

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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YOUNG WILD WEST'S PRIZE CLAIM; OR, THE GOLD OF GOOD-BYE GULCH. BY AN OLD SCOUT.



Cheyenne Charlie and Wild were busy filling the leather sacks with the rich ore when four masked men suddenly popped into view from behind a big rock near them. At the same moment Arietta appeared at the top of the cliff, followed by Jim and the Chinamen.

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YOUNG WILD WEST'S PRIZE CLAIM

—OR—

The Gold of Good-by Gulch

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

FLOYD COIT
N Y SOUTH OTSELIC

CHAPTER I.

GOOD-BY GULCH, ARIZONA.

It was high noon. The hot Arizona sun was shining with relentless force on the powdery sand and alkali dust that lay in the one and only street that ran through the little mining camp called Good-by Gulch.

The gulch itself was not a very wide one, but it wound its way tortuously to the lower ground fifty miles away.

In the center was about the widest part, and it was here where the camp had been formed, after half a dozen prospectors had struck it rich there.

In less than a month Good-by Gulch, so named because one of those who had first staked out a claim there, left with his pile three weeks later, to go and marry a Mexican girl, who was waiting for him in Phoenix; and as he rode away he took off his hat and yelled at the top of his voice: "Good-by, Gulch!"

There had been no name for the camp before this, and as those he left behind waved him a farewell, and wished him good luck, it struck them that Good-by Gulch was a good name for the place.

So Good-by Gulch it was when we open our story on the very hot day, a few years ago, when Arizona was in a much wilder state than at present.

The population could not have been more than sixty, all told, and of these less than a dozen were of the gentler sex.

Dandy Bill, the proprietor of the Red Eye saloon, had a wife, and so did Jack Waters, the boss of the Big 5 mine. Some of the miners were married, too, and more of them would have been, if they could have found mates.

As we have already stated, it was high noon, and as the

miners working on the claims that surrounded the little village of shanties and tents threw down their picks, shovels and pans and started for the saloon to "wet up" before going to dinner, a long covered wagon, drawn by four mules, rounded the bend in the trail that ended at the commencement of the single street in Good-by Gulch.

Some of the rough looking men saw it right away, and then it quickly spread among the workers that there was something new in town.

The four mules were driven by a middle-aged man, who sat on a seat with his feet on the swivel-tree, a very bald head showed.

Beside him sat a young woman, whose gaudy costume and face that was well covered with fresh paint and powder, would give the impression to the ordinary observer that she was an "actress."

It was certainly a rather striking sight for the miners of Good-by Gulch, when they got near enough to see the girl, for such a thing as a show had never yet appeared there.

But when they read the lettering on the side of the big wagon a cheer went up, for if lettered words meant anything there was going to be a real show in town.

"Professor Swell's Variety Show."

That was what they read.

The first of the miners to leave their work got to the saloon just as the mules halted in front of it.

Others came running up, so they might see all that was to be seen, and as the driver threw down the reins and bowed to them another shout went up.

The gaudily attired young woman hopped lightly to the ground and stood before them just as they had seen the female singers and dancers at the shows in Phoenix,

and when she began tripping about, holding up some of her finery, which was rather dingy-looking to say the least, the excitement arose to fever heat.

The driver now put on a broad Panama hat and stepped to the ground as gracefully as his rather stout form would permit him to, and holding up his hand for silence, called out:

"Thank you, gentlemen! I am more than pleased at the welcome you accord us. I——"

"Hooray! Hooray!" shouted the miners, waving their hats, while the young woman put on a few more fancy steps, as though to accompany them.

Then it was that the stout driver made a sign to somebody yet in the wagon, and out came a man, blacked up, attired in a comical costume and a banjo in his hand.

He was quickly followed by two young men in tights and a gaunt-looking young woman, who flourished a skipping-rope.

Then from the back of the long covered wagon something that looked like a big bundle done up in a crazy quilt tumbled.

This proved to be alive, and as it arose to an upright position the spectators saw it was a clown.

The driver now removed his hat, wiped his bald head with a big bandana, and called out:

"Line up!"

The six members of the show company obeyed like trained soldiers.

The miners ceased their shouting and other noise.

"Gentlemen," said the stout man, smiling and bowing, "before you stand Professor Swell and the artists of his variety show, late of New York and New Orleans. After a most successful engagement for a month in Phoenix, we have started on the road to take in all the mining towns in Arizona. Good-by Gulch is the first honored, and we all hope that the show will be well patronized, assuring you that no better artists can be obtained, no matter what the price. We will give our first performance here to-night, if I can hire a hall large enough, and if we are well received we will remain here a week, or more, if the occasion demands. The price of admission will be two dollars. Again thanking you for your most cordial reception, I will close my remarks and attend to the important matters connected with a traveling show."

If the crowd had shouted before it now fairly roared.

To say that the rough men of the camp were pleased at the coming of the show would be putting it mildly.

Nearly every man there was making plenty of money, and two dollars was but a flea bite, so to speak. Would they patronize the professor's show? Well, rather!

A sign from the professor and his artists leaped back into the wagon with amazing quickness, the clown turning a flip-flap as he disappeared into the rear end.

Then the professor mounted to the seat and drove around to the shady side of the shanty saloon, which, by the way, was the largest in the camp, and had a one-story attachment to it, which had a sign over the door declaring it to be a dance hall.

In five minutes' time a couple of the performers appeared in ordinary costume to assist the stout man, and then the mules were unhitched and turned loose to get at

the scattered mesquite bushes that grew on the bank of the small stream that flowed through the gulch.

Professor Swell then walked into the saloon and found Dandy Bill, resplendent in a pink shirt, yellow neckerchief and corduroy trousers, waiting for him, while his hired man dealt out the "tanglefoot" to the thirsty miners.

"I reckon I know what yer want, boss," said Dandy Bill, as he stroked his blonde mustache in a way that showed he considered it to be a sort of pet. "You want 'commodations.'"

"That is right, Mr. Dandy Bill; and the moment I read the sign over your door I felt sure that we could get them. Can you keep us while we remain in town?"

"I sartinly kin, if ther men folks is willin' ter sleep on ther floor," was the reply. "Yer see, we ain't quite up ter snuff yet, in ther way of 'commodations; but when it comes ter grub an' whisky, we are all here. Ain't that right, boys?"

"You bet, Bill!" answered somebody, and then a shout of assent went up.

"Well, that's the main part, I think," and the professor smiled and looked more than pleased. "A man can sleep out of doors in this climate. But we won't have to do that; we have got the wagon for the purpose. One of the ladies happens to be my wife, and the other is our clown's better half. If you can furnish us with our meals while we stay here we will be well satisfied."

"All right, Professor Swell. I'll grub ther whole seven of yer fur twenty-five dollars a day, three meals; an' I'll take chances on makin' up what I lose by ther cheap price on what yer buy at ther bar. Oh! I'm a reasonable galoot, I am."

"Well, that is quite a reasonable price, I must say," and the professor nodded his satisfaction. "But," and his face clouded a little, "if it happens that we don't have very large attendances at our performances I will have to raise the price of admission."

"Oh! that will be all right. Ther boys is all putty flush, an' they won't mind giving up a five fur front seats. Jest make it reserved seats in front five dollars. There ain't no one here as will kick. Ther gold dust is too plenty fur that."

Judging by the shouts of approval, Dandy Bill was right in what he said.

"It won't take more'n half an hour ter fix up you seven people," went on the proprietor. "I wasn't expectin' yer, yer see. But that's all right. I happen ter have plenty of grub on hand, an' there's more comin' in a day or two. I have all my stuff sent out from Phoenix, 'cept my meat, an' that's brought here by a couple of galoots what makes a business of huntin'. By ther time you're all ready I reckon my wife an' ther hired squaw she's got ter help her will have your grub ready. I've got two extra dinners ordered fur to-day, but them as ordered 'em ain't showed up yet. If they don't come I won't lose nothin', anyhow, 'cause you folks is here ter make up fur it. My rules is dinner from twelve ter one, supper from six ter seven, an' breakfast from six ter seven. Anyone as wants ter eat anything between meals has got ter pay extra."

"Which is all satisfactory to me," the professor said, assuringly. "I'll pay you a day in advance, Mr. Bill."

"Don't put no 'mister' ter my handle, professor. I'm jest plain Bill—Dandy Bill, they calls me, 'cause I takes a little pride in my dress. I'm all right, you kin bet, an' I run my shanty on a business basis. What are yer goin' ter have ter drink?"

"A little of yer best," replied the professor, as he handed over the required twenty-five dollars.

"Put out ther stuff, Ed," said Dandy Bill, nodding to his helper. "Treat all hands! That's ther kind of a hair-pin I am!"

But Ed, as he called him, knew pretty well that the boss was simply doing this for a bait. A few thousand dollars was coming over by the stagecoach that afternoon, so the miners might exchange their gold dust for it, and that meant that business would be brisk that night.

The professor drank with the crowd, and then he shook his head and said:

"I don't know whether I can afford to treat or not. I don't know just how business is going to be, you see. I have to watch out, so I will have enough money to pay my company their salaries, you know."

"Run ther chances," spoke up a big miner, conspicuous in a bright red shirt. "Nothin' ventured, nothin' gained, they say. I'll have so much money this afternoon that I won't know what ter do with it. Then I'll show yer what kind of a galoot I am."

The professor hesitated a moment, and then he ordered the round.

That made him solid.

Every man there was bound to go to the show that night, and as there must have been thirty present, it was bound to pay, especially if five dollars was charged for the reserved seats.

It was just about this time that a party of riders rode up before the saloon.

Though they did not appear to be show people, all hands rushed out to look them over, and they were much interested, too.

The party consisted of two boys, a tall man, with long black hair and a heavy mustache; two young girls, a young woman and two typical Chinamen.

All save the latter two were attired in fancy hunting suits of buckskin, and there was such a dashing way about them that it was not surprising that the miners should be interested.

To be brief about it, Young Wild West, the Champion Deadshot and dashing young Prince of the Saddle, had arrived at Good-by Gulch with his friends.

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG WILD WEST PITCHES HIS CAMP.

The Red Eye saloon being the most important looking place in Good-by Gulch, it was nothing strange that newcomers should choose it to stop before.

Then, again, the crowd that rushed out at sight of the picturesque party that had just come in was quite enough to convince them that it was the all-important place there.

The general store, a low structure that covered a good deal of ground, but had a rather narrow front to display the goods sold there, was almost directly opposite; but all the life seemed to be at the saloon, and there it was that Young Wild West stopped.

So much had been written about the dashing young deadshot that it is hardly necessary to state much in the way of description here.

Suffice it to say that though only a boy in years, he had made a name for himself by his coolness and daring, and willingness to always do right, no matter what the cost.

He was handsome as he was brave and dashing, and it was his wonderful shooting that had given him the title of the Champion Deadshot.

Being the owner of gold mines, the boy had an income that permitted him to pursue his favorite hobby, which was to ride about the wildest parts of the West in search of fortune and adventure.

His two partners, Cheyenne Charlie, who was the tall man referred to, and Jim Dart, the other boy mentioned, were like brothers to him, and they always stuck to him through thick and thin.

The two young girls, who might have been called mere children by some, were Arietta Murdock and Eloise Gardner, the pretty sweethearts of Young Wild West and Jim Dart; and the young woman was Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie, the ex-government scout and Indian fighter.

The two Chinamen—for we must not forget them—were brothers bearing the names of Hop Wah and Wing Wah.

Young Wild West and his two partners had, of course, been born and reared in the West. So had Arietta, the golden-haired sweetheart of our hero.

The other two girls—they always spoke of them as girls, though Anna was a married woman—had been in that part of the country quite long enough to learn to love the natural wildness and the perils and excitement they encountered.

Loved by all honest, law-abiding people and feared by evil-doers; ever ready to defend the weak and help the deserving, and having won the title of the Champion Deadshot of the West, Young Wild West was surely the ideal boy hero of the Wild West.

As he sat on the back of his splendid sorrel stallion, Spitfire, his long chestnut hair hanging over his shoulders, the boy certainly made a picture that an artist would have been glad to paint; and if it were done in colors his athletic form would have showed up in a blue silk shirt and bright buckskin trousers trimmed with scarlet fringe.

His Winchester rifle hung at his back by the strap, and his coat was strapped to the back of his saddle. In his belt were a pair of heavy Smith & Wesson revolvers of the latest type of the time, while the accoutrements of his horse were bright and shining.

"Well, boys," said the dashing young deadshot, speaking in the cool and easy way for which he had become famous, "I reckon this is Good-by Gulch, isn't it?"

"That's what we call it, young feller," answered Jack Waters, the foreman of the Big 5 mine, as he nodded his head, and pulled out a plug of tobacco. "Seems ter

me I know you, though I can't say as I ever seen yer afore. Say! ain't you Young Wild West?"

"You've guessed just right, pard," answered the boy, smiling at him. "I reckon you must have heard something about me. Now suppose you tell me whether it was good or bad?"

"It was all good what I heard, Young Wild West. I'm right glad ter meet yer, blamed if I ain't! I'll shake with yer, if you don't mind."

The young deadshot slipped from his saddle and put out his hand.

"I reckon you're one of the sort of men I like to meet," he said, coolly. "But I know you were the moment you spoke. I am a pretty good judge of a person, when I once look at their faces, and hear them express themselves, you know."

The miner gripped his hand and gave it a hearty shake.

"You're all there, my boy!" he exclaimed. "I'm a little bit deceived in seein' that you're so young. Sometimes they calls a man a boy, yer know; an' I had an idea that yer could as much as vote, anyhow."

"Well, I can't yet," and the boy laughed. "But when I do it will be over in Texas. I happen to own a ranch down on the Rio Grande, and I like the place well enough to call it my home."

The two men belonging to the show now came around from the wagon, and they looked at the girls of the party with more than ordinary interest.

As they were attired in ordinary female apparel now, they did not seem out of place to the girls in Young Wild West's party; though if they had seen them a few minutes before they might have opened wide their eyes.

The paint and powder was still on their faces, and they no doubt thought they looked "stunning."

But the red cheeks of the girls was Nature's own handiwork, and the beauty they possessed was real.

Young Wild West and his two partners quickly sized up the saloon, and they soon came to the conclusion that it would be better for them to go into camp and let their cook fix up the noonday meal for them.

"How about putting up on one of the vacant spots around here?" the young deadshot asked, nodding to Jack Waters.

"Sartin sure," was the reply. "Go ahead. I reckon there's a good place right along ther creek there. There ain't no one here as will bother yer, as I know of. But Big Chock an' his pal might have somethin' ter say about it when they show up. Howsumever, from what I've heard of you, Young Wild West, you'll be able ter match him all right."

"Well, we are not looking for trouble, pard," was the reply. "If you say it is all right for us to camp over there, we'll do it."

"Go on an' do it. I'm a sort of leader here, an' what I says is putty sure ter go, though sometimes there's a little trouble with Big Chock an' his pal. I'm all right, though, an' they don't scare me any. I kin hold my own with ther galoots."

The truth was that our friends were pretty well tired from the long ride they had had in the burning sun, and they were really anxious to get under the trees that grew

on the spot the miner had pointed out as a good place for them to camp.

"I reckon we'll get out of the sun," said the boy, turning to his companions. "Come on."

He led his horse to the spot, and the rest rode over, while Jack Waters swung his hat over his head and yelled:

"Three cheers fur Young Wild West, ther Champion Deadshot!"

The majority of the miners joined in giving the cheers, and the boy waved his hand in acknowledgement.

"I reckon this is what yer might call a putty lively sort of a camp," said Cheyenne Charlie, as they came to a halt at the spot they had selected. "Looks mighty prosperous around here, an' no mistake! Did yer see that big wagon? A show is goin' ter be here."

They all agreed with him that it was a likely-looking sort of a place, and that it was very evident that there was going to be a show there.

"Me likee see um show, so be," remarked the Chinaman called Hop Wah.

"I reckon you kin give 'em enough of a show ter wake 'em up, Hop," said the scout, grinning. "Any galoot what kin do what you kin is able ter get 'most any kind of a crowd surprised."

"Me allee samee velly muchee smartee Chinee, so be, Misler Charlie," was the grinning reply. "Me blother, he was velly smartee, too; but he velly muchee goodee now; he lettee me be um clevee Chinee."

What the Chinaman meant by "clevee Chinee" was that he was often called Young Wild West's Clever Chinaman, and this was because he was a sleight-of-hand performer of no mean ability, and a professional card sharp, as well. Besides these qualifications, if such they could be called, he was very fond of whisky and liked practical joking.

But he had often been the means of saving the lives of different members of the party by his cleverness and quick wit, and that made him solid with all hands, so to speak.

When the scout said he could give a performance he spoke the truth, for Hop always made it a point to buy various articles and compounds he would have use for in performing his tricks and jokes whenever they stopped at a city or town where such things were for sale.

So much for Hop Wah, the clever Chinaman, for the present.

All hands joined in the work of getting the camp in shape, and it was not long before the two tents they had with them were erected under the trees, and a fire started.

Young Wild West and his companions had shot plenty of game the day before, so there was nothing lacking in that line to cook for dinner.

Their stores were not exhausted, either, and they were able to get up a fine meal without making a call at the supply store.

Before one o'clock they had satisfied their hunger and were preparing to take it easy for a while, when two horsemen were seen approaching the saloon.

One was a big, powerful looking fellow, and the other was one of the slender sort, with a sneaky aspect.

Our hero could generally pick out a man for what he

was as soon as he had a look at him, and turning to his companions, he said:

"I may be wrong, but I'll bet a five dollar gold piece to a silver quarter that the two galoots are Big Chock and his pal! We had better get ready for trouble, I suppose, for the leader of the camp said enough to make me think that these two galoots will try to run us out of here."

CHAPTER III.

BIG CHOCK AND HIS PAL.

Young Wild West guessed just right when he thought the two horsemen were the bad pair known as Big Chock and his pal.

The pal's name was Jug Porter, or that is all the name anyone in the camp knew him by.

The fact was that the two were almost inseparable, both being villains of the lowest order.

Big Chock was of the brutal type, while his pal was one of the cunning scoundrels so often met with, who, though he thought nothing of killing a man, much preferred to do it in a sneaky way.

His very looks implied this much, as did the general appearance of the big ruffian indicate that he was a brute.

Over six feet, and broad and weighty in proportion, Big Chock surely looked to be a dangerous customer.

He usually had his own way in Good-by Gulch—not because all the men there feared him so much, but because they thought it just as well to let him go ahead, so long as he did not tread too heavily on their corns.

The two dinners engaged at the saloon, and of which the proprietor had spoken, were for these two men, and as they halted and looked at the big wagon that was standing at the side of the shanty structure, Big Chock called out:

"What's this I see? A caravan has struck ther Gulch, blamed if it ain't, Jug. Jest read what it says on ther side. I can't make out letters very good, an' I never could when I went ter school."

"Professor Swell's Variety Show, is what she reads, Chock," quickly answered his pal. "I reckon there's goin' ter be a show in town. It is good we didn't stay away till to-morrer. We couldn't hardly afford ter miss it."

"Show, eh? Well, that sounds mighty good, for a one-horse camp, like this. Well, we'll soon find out somethin' about it. It's free tickets fur me an' you, of course."

Both men dismounted and let their horses go loose, without even unloosening a saddle girth.

But it was not more than a minute before a darky employed by Dandy Bill came and got them and took them to the shed that was in the rear of the shanty saloon and hall.

Big Chock swaggered into the bar of the place in his usual style, acting very much as though he was just in the humor to fight someone, and did not care just who it might be.

"Hello, Chock!" called out Dandy Bill, smiling at them. "You're on time, I reckon. Ther dinner is all ready. All's you've got ter do is ter wash up an' set right down."

"Good enough, Bill. But give us a little of your bug-

juice first. We've had a long ride of it. Been in ther saddle ever since six o'clock this mornin'. Our bottle of stuff run out about ten, an' we ain't wet our lips since."

They were quickly served, and then it was not long before they were eating their dinner.

Dandy Bill joined them, since he had been too busy helping to serve those who had already eaten to dine himself, and as he ate he answered the questions of Big Chock in regard to the big wagon and the show people.

Jug Porter asked no questions, whatever. His friend did all that, and he listened, remembering everything that was said, so he might be able to enlighten the big ruffian at any time he required it.

"I s'pose you've heard tell of ther boy they call Young Wild West, Chock?" observed the proprietor, after a pause.

"No," was the reply, "I can't say as I have. But what about him, Bill?"

"Well," and Dandy Bill wiped his mustache in the careful way he had about him, "they say that he's a regular hum-scorcher. Got more nerve than ten ordinary men, an' holds claim to ther title of ther Champion Dead-shot of ther West."

"I see," and Big Chock nodded. "He's one of ther fresh young galoots we sometimes run across. Tries ter scare people, an' all that."

Jug Porter grinned at this, for it probably struck him that his big pal was really giving a description of himself, and unthinkingly, at that.

"Well, I don't know much about him; but I heard Jack Waters say he had heard a lot about ther boy an' his two pards. I will say that I never did see a likelier lookin' young chap than he is, though."

"You've seen him, then?"

Big Chock looked surprised.

"Yes, he's right here in Good-by Gulch this very minute. I heard him askin' Jack Waters if there was a place where they could pitch their camp, an' Jack showed him a place out back here alongside ther creek. Jack told him that it wasn't likely that anyone would bother 'em, without it might be you. Now, what I was goin' ter say is that I wouldn't interfere with 'em. There's three gals with 'em; an' they seem ter be like fine gals, too. Then there's a couple of heathens with 'em, too, an' they——"

"Heathens with 'em!" echoed the big ruffian. "Don't yer know that we've put a ban on Chinese labor in this here camp? You've heard me say that I'd shoot ther first heathen what showed up here, an' wanted work, ain't yer, Bill?"

"Yes, that's right. That's why I've been feelin' sorter uneasy since you got here. Now ther two Chinamen what's with Young Wild West an' his friends ain't lookin' fur work; they're jest with ther party, yer know. If I was you I'd let 'em alone, 'cause we want ter git our population increased, an' ther chances is that they've come here ter try their luck in ther Gulch. There's room fur a whole lot more here, an' you know it. Ther more gold there is taken out ther better will be my business, an' yourn, too. I make mine by sellin' bug-juice an' runnin' a faro game, an' you make yours playin' draw poker."

Big Chock laughed, and it was a hoarse laugh, at that.

"All right," said he. "But you jest wait till I git steamed up a little! I'll pay attention to ther two Chinese an' don't yer furgit it. An' then, if this here boy yer say is ther Champion Deadshot interferences, I'll show him that I'm somethin' in that line myself. Bill, a show has come to ther camp, an' that means a lively time fur everybody. But when I git a few more swallers of bug-juice in me I'm goin' ter run a little side-show all by myself."

"I was afraid yer would, Chock, an' that's why I spoke about it."

But the proprietor did not seem to realize that he had helped it along.

The meal over, Big Chock and his pardner went to the barroom.

There were few there now, save Professor Swell and the male members of his troupe.

The miners had either returned to their work, or were at their shanties or tents, eating a delayed meal, on account of the arrivals at the camp.

Jack Waters, the boss of Big 5 mine, was there, however.

He seemed to have a purpose in remaining, too, and when Big Chock saw him he promptly said:

"Well, Jack, I hear that we've got a champion deadshot in town."

"Yes, I s'pose you've heard of Young Wild West," was the reply.

"No; I never heard of him till Bill was tellin' me at ther dinner table. What about him, anyhow?"

"Well, they say he has got ther reputation of handlin' himself in great style. He's a sort of young feller what stands up fur what's right. He kin shoot straighter an' faster than most folks would believe, too."

"Huh! You talk as though no one else can shoot quick an' straight. Jack, I reckon yer know what I kin do, when I make up my mind ter do it."

"Yes, I know. I ain't slow myself. You know that, too."

The big ruffian frowned.

"Yes, I know you're full of grit, Jack," he admitted. "But say! Are you goin' ter allow Chinese labor here?"

"Not at ther Big 5 mine, Chock."

"That's what I thought. Come an' have a drink."

The foreman miner accepted the invitation, probably because he did not care about getting into an argument with him.

The show people were invited, too, and then Dandy Bill introduced them.

"I'm about ther worst man what ever lived, when I git mad," Big Chock explained, as he smiled at the actors and threw out his chest. "I'll leave it ter my pal if I ain't. How about it, Jug?"

"You sartinly are, Chock," was the quick reply.

"But of course I wouldn't hurt you fellers," went on Chock. "I like show people too well ter do anything ter hurt 'em. Here's luck! Everybody drink!"

Everybody did, and when he had wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his shirt, the big man continued:

"I s'pose you fellers would like ter see a little fun. Jest come with me. I'm goin' ter kill a couple of Chinamen."

The professor and his men were astonished to hear

this, while the faces of Dandy Bill and the miners turned slightly pale.

Jack Waters showed signs of great uneasiness.

"Better let 'em alone, Chock," he advised. "Maybe Young Wild West wouldn't stand fur anything like that."

"Well, if he don't stand for it he kin lay down ter it, then," was the retort.

"All right. I ain't goin' ter interfere."

Probably the boss of the Big 5 mine thought there would be no need of it.

He had heard a lot about the dashing young deadshot and his partners, he had already declared, and that probably meant that he thought they would be able to take care of themselves.

"Well, give us another drink, anyhow," he added, nodding to Dandy Bill, who had relieved his man, and was in charge of the little bar himself.

Just then Hop Wah, one of the Chinamen the big ruffian had decided to kill, walked into the place, bowing and smiling.

He was not alone, for right behind him were Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BIG CHOCK AND HIS PAL.

A hush fell over those in the barroom of the Red Eye saloon when the Chinaman entered, followed by Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie.

Every man there felt that something was going to happen, for had not Big Chock said he was going out to kill a couple of Chinamen?

Here was one of them now, and Professor Swell and the members of his troupe edged back to a corner, so they might escape being shot accidentally.

Those who knew the big ruffian well stepped out of the way, too, for they knew for a certainty that there was going to be trouble.

But Jack Waters was going to prevent it if he could, and he quickly called out:

"Hello, Young Wild West! I see that yer got located all right. I reckon no one will bother with yer here. You'll find Good-by Gulch a good, healthy camp, I think."

"I hope so," was the boy's reply. "We thought we'd better drop in and see you, as our Chinaman here wanted to get here badly. We thought he might get into trouble if he came alone, you know. Some people don't like heathens, it seems, and we didn't know whether there were any of that sort here or not."

"Yer didn't know, eh?"

It was Big Chock who asked the question, as he stepped to the center of the room, fairly bristling with importance. "Well, I'll tell yer right now that there is! I'm one that says that there ain't no heathen Chinese goin' ter stay her, an' live! How does that strike yer?"

He reached for his gun, but before he got it from the holster the boy cried out, sharply:

"Take your hand away from that, you big galoot!"

Then his own revolver flashed in his hand and Big Chock was covered.

It happened so quickly that the miners blinked their eyes, while the members of the troupe crowded closer to the corner.

There was something about the dashing young deadshot that told them that he was one not to be trifled with.

His remarkable coolness, added to the quickness he displayed when he pulled his gun, was quite enough to convince them that Big Chock was treading on dangerous ground.

"Me no wantee die; me allee samee wantee lillie dlink of tanglefoot," piped the Chinaman, smiling blandly and stepping to the bar.

Then, just as though it was nothing more than play that was going on, he laid a silver dollar on the bar.

Big Chock let go his gun, and it dropped back into the holster.

Jug Porter tried to smile, but made a miserable failure of it, for he knew better than most of them that the boy was very, very dangerous.

He did not need to be told that, for he was something more than an ordinary observer.

"Chock," said he, turning to the big ruffian, "you didn't mean yer was goin' to kill any Chinaman unless he went ter work here, did yer?"

That was a cue to let Big Chock out of it, but he did not seem to want to get out of it that way. He had bragged about his being such a bad man that he felt that he must keep his word.

"I said jest now that I was goin' out ter kill two Chinamen," he said, trying to appear cool, but failing almost utterly. "But I won't have ter go out ter shoot but one now. One of 'em has come in ter take his medicine here. Now, young feller, jest put away that gun of yours. I reckon yer don't know that ye're likely ter make one of ther worst men what ever lived very mad, if yer keep on p'intin' that at me."

Cheyenne Charlie broke into a laugh.

That sounded about as funny to him as anything he had heard in a long time.

A smile crept over the face of the dashing boy hero, too, and looking steadily at the big man, he said:

"I happened to hear what you said just before we came in, you sneakin' coyote! I never saw you before, and I don't know you. But I assure you that you are not going to kill any Chinamen while I am around. If you try it I'll throw you out of this place so quick that you won't know what struck you!"

"An' if any galoot makes a move ter pull a gun he'll git a lead pill right where it'll do ther most good!" added the scout; and then accepting the nod Hop gave him as an invitation to drink with him, he stepped up to the bar.

Young Wild West coolly dropped his revolver back into the holster.

"Now then," said he, "go ahead and kill the Chinaman."

It seemed like inviting a slaughter right in the saloon, but not so to our hero.

He had met and conquered men fully as big, and as bad as Big Chock was.

His remarkable coolness and quickness, added to his skill and strength, had always brought him out a winner, too.

But the ruffian certainly felt easier when the boy put away his revolver.

His courage arose, too, and forcing a smile, he answered:

"When I git ready ter do it I'll go right ahead, an' no one will stop me, either."

"All right. When you get ready, go ahead. But I wouldn't wait too long, if I were you. The crowd is anxious to see the two Chinamen killed."

Big Chock was but waiting for the chance to get his gun out.

But he meant to shoot the boy first.

He looked around at his pal, and the two exchanged glances.

Cheyenne Charlie was watching the sneaky man hard, however, and there would surely be a call for the undertaker if he made the least move to perform a sneaky act.

The scout had him down fine, so to speak.

Hop knew he was perfectly safe, and he had no sooner swallowed the drink he had ordered than he was ready to surprise the big man.

He never once doubted that our hero could handle the man, and that made him all the more daring.

"Whatee you wantee killee poor Chinees for?" he asked. "Me allee samee velly goodee Chinees, so be. Me go to um Sunday school in Flisco."

"You'll go somewheres else mighty soon, I reckon," was the reply.

"Let's have a smoke," said our hero, turning to Dandy Bill.

It was a chance Big Chock had been looking for, and his hand grabbed for his gun.

He managed to get it from the holster, and then—
Crack!

Young Wild West had trapped him, for he had turned to the boss of the saloon on purpose to make the villain do something, and he drew his revolver and fired.

Big Chock uttered a cry and dropped his gun to the floor.

The blood was trickling from the back of his hand, where the bullet had grazed it.

"You should have been quicker, if you wanted to get me," the boy said, as he coolly walked up to him. "Now then, I am going to throw you outside, and I am not going to be particular how you land, either. But I'll give you a chance. Get ready!"

But the big scoundrel was too much surprised to get ready for anything.

Biff!

The young deadshot's right fist shot out like a piston-rod and it caught him squarely on the short ribs.

A gasp came from him, and as he was in the act of dropping, Wild darted behind him and swung his right arm around his neck.

Then up went the boy in an erect position, and Big Chock was hanging over his back like a quarter of beef.

The door was open, and on a run, Wild went out,

stopping short as he passed the threshold, and dropping his head.

There could be but one result, and that was that Big Chock went over his head and landed with a dull thud on the ground.

Cheyenne Charlie, always impetuous, but now stirred to a high pitch, made a leap for Jug Porter.

The sneaky look of the man angered him, anyhow, and if he had not heard the boss of the Big 5 mine say he was a bad man, he would have thought so, anyhow.

He caught the bad man's pal before he was hardly aware of what was coming.

Being but a lightweight, the scout handled him as though he was but a child.

"Look out, Wild!" he called out, and then, before he was within six feet of the door he hurled the sneak out. Jug had better luck in landing than his pal had.

He struck on his hands and feet, cat-like, and he rolled over without being hurt.

Big Chock had been jarred so badly that he lay like one dead.

"I reckon that'll be about all for the present," said our hero, as he coolly walked in. "Dandy Bill, we'll have that smoke I spoke about a minute or so ago."

But Dandy Bill was so agitated that the cigar box shook in his hand as he passed it to the boy.

"I never seen anything like that in my whole life!" he cried. "It don't seem possible that a boy could chuck a man as big as Chock is out like that. You're ther strongest feller I ever seen, Young Wild West!"

"Oh, it wasn't my strength so much," was the reply. "It is knowing how to do it, more than anything. Step up, gentlemen, and have a smoke. I never drink anything strong myself, and I feel like smoking. I hope you all feel the same."

Whether they did or not, they all took cigars, even to Hop, who was grinning, as though it was a little performance that had been gotten up for his especial benefit.

Meanwhile Jug Porter was assisting Big Chock to his feet, and as soon as he got him up they walked away from the front of the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

HOP SHOWS WHAT HE CAN DO.

"Lat too bad, so be," observed Hop Wah, as he saw the two villains leaving the scene. "Me wantee showee um bad mans velly nicee lillee tlick, so be."

"I reckon they was showed a trick all right, Hop," answered Cheyenne Charlie, with a grin. "That's ther sickest lookin' pair of dangerous bad men I ever seen. Why, that big galoot is a four-flusher from Windyville, an' no mistake! None of your magic sleight-of-hand work wasn't needed ter shake 'em up."

"What's that?" queried one of the men belonging to the traveling show. "I beg pardon; but did you say the Chinaman was a magician?"

"Well, if he ain't, he's somethin' mighty near it," the scout replied.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. I am Joe Dumps, the comical acrobat in our show. I'm called the clown, you know."

"I see. I s'pose you kin do tricks, too, then?"

"Well, I don't pose as a sleight-of-hand performer, but I can do something in that line."

"Me velly glad to meet you, so be," spoke up Hop, and he put out his hand, which the clown took and shook heartily.

Then the professor came up, and when the clown had introduced him, he made our friends acquainted with the others of the troupe.

The ladies are inside helping the mistress of the house," he assured them. "I will take pleasure in making you acquainted with them later on. I know they will be pleased to get acquainted with the ladies of your party."

"All right," Charlie answered. "I reckon they will. What kind of a show are yer goin' ter put up? Is it goin' ter be to-night?"

"Yes, we will open up to-night for an unlimited engagement. We have got a good show, of course. The best talent in the world is right here in Good-by Gulch at this very minute."

"Good enough! If Big Chock and his pal lets us, we'll come around an' see yer to-night."

"Oh! they'll let yer, I reckon," spoke up Jack Waters. "But I want ter tell yer something. You must look out fur them two. When Big Chock said he was a bad man he didn't tell no lie. By that I mean that he won't stop at nothin' ter git square. Then there's his pal, Jug Porter. That feller is ther worst of ther two, 'cause he's sneaky and does his work on ther sly. Don't think that they're done with you, Young Wild West."

"I am not thinking that way, boss," our hero retorted. "But I will say this much: If they don't look out they will be done with us, and everything else, too. There's a limit, you know, and if the galoots go too far it means that there is going to be work for the grave digger."

"Well, I don't know but what we could git along jest about as well if they wasn't here," said Dandy Bill. "Of course Big Chock is a mighty good spender; but he wins his money from ther men in ther camp, an' if he didn't git it, an' then spend it, they'd do it themselves. No! I reckon ther camp would be better off if it didn't have Chock here. He drives trade away from my place when he's got his tantrums on."

"Yes, an' he's drove men away what has come here ter go ter work," spoke up a miner. "Some fellers is a little more timid than others, an' them kind scares easy. Maybe Big Chock is all right, in a way, but it's a mighty poor way."

"Well," and Wild looked around at his hearers, "I didn't want ter have any trouble with ther big galoot; but from what the boss said before we went into camp, I supposed we would have some when he came here. We saw the two men ride up, and after waiting a while we came over to the saloon here. Hop wanted a drink pretty badly, and I thought he might get into trouble if he came alone. I don't drink myself; but I know Hop does."

That's his business, the same as it is with anybody else. I don't preach temperance, even if I feel sure that a person is a great deal better off, in every way, if he lets liquor alone. Hop is a good fellow, even if he is a 'heathen Chineese'; and if it is his failing to want to drink, I let him drink, so long as he don't get drunk. If he does that he generally hears from me good and hard. But what I was going to say is that as we were coming in I heard Big Chock say he was going out to kill a couple of Chinamen. I made up my mind that the chances were that he would go out, but that he wouldn't kill anything. I reckon he went out all right."

"Three cheers fur Young Wild West, ther whitest boy what ever struck Good-by Gulch!" shouted Jack Waters, swinging his hat.

The cheers were given in a spirit that showed that the men were not putting on anything, and our hero responded by doffing his sombrero.

"Me likee havee um bad mans allee same comee back, so be," remarked Hop, after a short silence when the cheering was over.

"Come on out, an' we'll fetch 'em back," said the scout, quickly. "I reckon you want ter show 'em a little of your magic, eh, Hop?"

"Lat light, Misler Wild. You allee samee goodee guessee."

"Look out for them, Charlie," advised Wild. "Especially the sneaky galoot. I reckon he's about the worst of the two, when you get right down to hard pan."

"Oh! I'll be on ther watch. Don't make no mistake on that.

The two went out just as though it was anything but a dangerous errand they were on.

They found the two villains at the shed in the rear of the big shanty.

They were rubbing down their horses, something that they would not have thought of doing if they had not been thrown out of the saloon.

It was not necessary for them to do it, anyhow, since the stableman had attended to it.

When they saw Cheyenne Charlie and the Chinaman approaching they showed unmistakable signs of uneasiness.

"Say, you two sneaking coyotes," said Charlie, "you're wanted in ther whisky mill right away."

"Who wants us?" queried Jug Porter, suspiciously.

"Well, I do, fur one."

"Me wantee, for two, so be," chimed in Hop, smiling in his bland way.

"What do you want us fur?" spoke up Big Chock.

"Well, I'll tell yer this much; we ain't goin' ter hurt yer. This here Chinaman, whose name is Hop Wah, is goin' ter show a little of what he kin do in magic, an' we want you two galoots ter see it, jest ter show yer what a mistake you'd have made if you had gone an' shot him, as yer wanted ter. Do yer understand now?"

"Yes; what you say is plain enough," whispered Jug Porter. "But how do we know but that yer mean ter plug us with lead, or somethin' like that."

Charlie gave a contemptuous sniff.

"I reckon if we wanted ter do that we'd come right out here an' do it. Don't think anything like that. Young

Wild West ain't that kind of a boy. If he was ter put up a job ter kill somebody he wouldn't be on ther level; an' there ain't no one as kin tell ter truth an' say that he ever done a thing that wasn't fair. But I'll tell yer one thing, you sneakin' coyotes! If I'd had my way about it you'd both be stretched out about now, with blankets over yer. I know that you're no good, an' any galoots as is no good ain't fit ter live. But, as I jest said afore, you're wanted in ther whisky mill jest ter see Hop do some sleight-of-hand work. Now come on in, an' don't say yer won't, either."

"All right; we'll come," said Jug.

It was evident that the sneak thought it would be quite as safe from them inside as it was where they were.

One might think that the two scoundrels would have been apt to open fire on Charlie and the Chinaman when they approached them; but such was not the case.

Certainly they would have liked to do so, but they knew what would happen to them if they did.

They left their horses and headed for the saloon right away, the scout and Hop walking along with them.

"I reckon you fellers ain't so bad as they say yer are," observed Charlie, with a grin. "Yer seem like very peaceable fellers, ter me."

The back of Big Chock's hand was still bleeding, and he wiped it with his handkerchief, without saying anything.

"Yer ain't hurt much," went on the scout. "That was jest a little sample that Young Wild West give yer. Oh! he's ther Champion Deadshot of ther West, all right."

"He kin shoot mighty quick, anyhow," Jug admitted.

"Yes, an' he always puts ther bullet jest where he wants it ter go, too."

When the two men walked into the barroom of the saloon they looked rather sheepish.

The same little crowd was there, waiting for them, and the clown showed his eagerness for Hop to proceed the moment the Chinaman came in.

"I reckon we had better have somethin' afore anything further is done," said Jack Waters. "Bill, jest give ther boys what they want."

Dandy Bill lost no time in doing so, and then Hop selected both Big Chock and Joe Dumps, the clown, as his victims.

He went to them separately and told them how his uncle in China had been one of the greatest magicians the world ever knew, and that he took after him in that respect.

While he was talking to them he was doing something else, but no one saw what it was.

But if they both had thought to search their pockets immediately after he left them Chock would have missed a pipe he prized greatly, and the clown would have found himself minus of his watch.

But that was all in the sleight-of-hand business, so there was really nothing very strange about it.

Hop now brought out his big yellow silk handkerchief that he used solely to aid him in performing some of his tricks.

He shook it out, so that all hands might see that there was nothing in it, or attached to it.

Then he pulled out an egg that was about the size of those found in a sparrow's nest.

"Evellybody watchee," he said, smiling at the assemblage.

They all did, the professor being one of the keenest observers of the lot.

Being a showman, he no doubt knew about everything in the line of sleight-of-hand tricks, even if he could not perform them himself.

He wanted to see if the Chinaman could show anything that was new.

"Lis um lattlesnake egg," Hop remarked, as he handled the little egg very coolly. "Me likee havee um hat to makee lillee nest, so be."

Then he reached over and took Big Chock's hat.

The man did not make any protest, so the egg was carefully placed in it and the hat set upon the bar.

Hop invited all hands to step up and look into the hat, so they would be sure it was there.

This they did, and while they were looking he got close to both his victims again.

If they had looked in their pockets just then they would have been much surprised, probably.

But that would come later on, for the clever Celestial was simply playing his real trick while he was keeping their attention upon the hat and egg, which he had declared was a rattlesnake's."

He had everything the way he wanted it now, so he went right ahead.

"My uncle in China showee me how to makee um egg hatchee velly muchee quicke," he remarked. "Me puttee um egg in um hat, so be," and he took the hat from the bar and showed them all that it was still there. "Len me covvee uppee with um magic handkelchief, so be, allee samee velly goodee. Len me steppee backee and say sometling in Chinee, and len me pickee uppee um handkelchief, and you allee samee see um egg have hatchee. Evellybody watchee."

Hop now looked at the ceiling a moment, and then he began muttering something which no one could understand and shut his eyes.

This over with, he stepped up to the hat, opening his eyes as he did so.

Without a word, he lifted the handkerchief and then motioned for them to look into the hat.

A cry of amazement went up from those who got a look.

Coiled in the hat was a rattlesnake that must have been easily a foot in length.

The clown, who was one of the first to get sight of it, jumped back out of the way with remarkable agility.

Big Chock turned pale and he, too, got out of the way.

Dandy Bill's handsome mustache stood out straight for a second, and he motioned for the Chinaman to get the snake out of the place.

"Whattree mattee?" asked Hop, innocently, while Cheyenne Charlie grinned broadly. "Um nicee lillee lattle-snakee no hurtee somebody, so be."

Then he coolly picked it out, clutching it right behind the head, and walked around the room.

The slimy serpent wriggled and twisted, as though it

was anxious to get free and show what it could do with its fangs.

However, if anyone had paid strict attention to the mouth they would surely have noticed that it did not move a particle.

There was nothing surprising in this, since it was merely a piece of rubber fashioned into the shape of a snake and painted by the ingenious Chinaman.

But no one but Wild and Charlie knew this, and the result was that Hop had them all in a terrible fright for a few minutes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SHOOTING MATCH.

Young Wild West thought it best to tell the men what kind of a snake it was that Hop had hatched from the egg, so he quickly took the rubber imitation from him, and holding it by the tail, said:

"Gentlemen, I reckon the bite of this thing would not be fatal. It is only rubber, you see. It is merely one of our clever Chinaman's articles that he uses in performing his so-called magic. But you will all admit that it was cleverly done, for the egg has disappeared."

Hop tossed the hat to Big Chock, who looked inside very carefully before he put it on his head.

"I think I'll have ter treat on ther strength of that trick," observed Dandy Bill. "I ain't ashamed ter say that I ain't got no love fur a rattler, an' I thought that was one of ther real things. Of course if I seen one anywhere on ther ground I wouldn't scare. I'd soon kill it. But ter have one in a hat, an' right on my bar! That sorter puts it to ther limit."

He took the rubber snake in his hand and looked it over, and then out came a bottle and the glasses.

Hop was right on hand when the drinks were in order, though he was careful not to take too much.

He knew that Wild was watching him, and that if he got too much aboard he would be called for it.

When he put down his glass, after first putting down the contents, he turned to the clown of the show suddenly and said:

"Whattree timee you gottee?"

It was nothing more than natural that the man should undertake to pull out his watch to answer the query.

But when he put his hand in his pocket he found that the timepiece was not there.

He looked dismayed, and felt in all his pockets, just as a person will do under like circumstances.

The result was that he pulled out a fancy looking pipe. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Where did that come from? I've lost my watch, and I've got a pipe in the place of it. What does this mean?"

"Me no undelstandee," Hop retorted, shaking his head, as though he had no idea what the fellow was driving at.

"Say!" cried Big Chock, stepping up. "That looks like my pipe. I happen ter know it when I see it, 'cause I never seen another one like it. How did you git it, stranger?"

"You tell me and I'll tell you," was the reply. "But are you sure it is your pipe?"

The big man felt in his pockets.

Suddenly a look of amazement came over his face.

He pulled out a watch, something he did not own just then, and held it up.

"That's my watch!" exclaimed the clown, his face lighting up.

"An' that's my pipe!"

The two stood looking at each other in great surprise, while the rest, with the exception of Wild and Charlie, showed how astounded they were.

"Velly strange," remarked Hop, as he shook his head.

Cheyenne Charlie broke into a laugh, and the majority present joined in.

"Very clever indeed," said Professor Swell. "I will confess that I did not see just how it was done; but, of course, I know the Chinaman must have made the change. Shake hands, Hop. I am always glad to make the acquaintance of a good artist of the profession. You are certainly a good one."

Hop shook with him, and then he smiled and bowed to the small audience.

Our hero wanted to look over the camp, for he had been struck with the idea that there was plenty of gold in the Gulch.

When he saw Big Chock and his pal take seats at a table in a corner of the room he decided to let them go at that, though he knew very well that they had a very strong feeling against him.

"Gentlemen," he said, as he got ready to leave, "I hope no one will interfere with our clever Chinaman or his brother, our cook. Neither of them came here for the purpose of taking the place of Americans, as far as working is concerned. I know that Big Chock don't like the way things have gone this morning, but if he is wise he will let it drop. The next time I take a shot at him the chances are that he won't know what hit him."

"An' his sneaky pal had better be mighty careful, too," spoke up the scout, looking at Jug Porter in a way that boded no good to him.

There was no reply to either of the remarks.

Wild and Charlie went on out, leaving the Chinaman there, for they were pretty certain that no harm would befall him, and there was nothing for him to do at the camp.

"I reckon I'll git ter work now," remarked Jack Waters, as he followed our friends.

He went along with them to the little camp on the bank of the creek.

"Say, Young Wild West," he said, when they got there, "I reckon there's a chance fur you ter strike a good thing here."

"How is that?" our hero asked.

"Well, I represent a good deal of property around here which is owned by five rich men down in Phoenix. They are mighty anxious ter boom things up this way. They want ter put up a smeltin' plant, but there ain't enough ore bein' took out ter make it pay, hardly. They want ter make people come here an' git things on a hustle. Was yer in Phoenix afore yer struck here?"

"No," answered our hero, while the rest of our friends

looked much interested. "We mean to go there when we leave here, though. We have to stop at a big place once in a while, you know."

"Well, then, it ain't likely you've heard what's goin' on. When ther stagecoach comes over this afternoon there'll be quite a few passengers, most likely, for ther owners of ther land here has been advertisin' it in Phoenix that a shootin' match will take place here to-morrer mornin', an' ther prize will be a claim that lays at the east end of our property. It's right under a hill, where there's s'posed ter be a vein runnin' through, I don't mind tellin' yer. But the owners don't care fur that. What they want ter do is ter git business on ther hustle. We've got plenty of good pay-dirt ter work, an' it will save ther trouble of hirin' men ter find ther stuff, if they kin git somebody else ter take hold of ther claims around here. Now, I'm goin' ter be in charge of this here shootin' match, an' ther fee ter go in is goin' ter be five dollars. Ther chances is that there'll be a dozen or more crack shots down Phoenix way ter come here. Here's a chance fur you."

"Well, I reckon you can count on me to take a chance, though I won't say that I'll stay here and work the claim, if I should win it," Wild answered.

"Well, that's all right. You'll sell it, won't yer?"

"Oh, yes."

"All right, then. I'll let yer know more about it afore night."

Then, tipping his hat to the girls, who had been listening to the conversation with not a little interest, he took leave.

"I reckon that's pretty good, eh, Wild?" Jim Dart remarked, when the mine boss had gone. "Even if you don't work the claim, you may as well show them that you can win it."

"That's right, Jim. But it may be that I won't be able to win it. The country is full of crack shots, you know. It all depends on what kind of a shoot it is. A plain target would not settle it. Well, I'll go in for it, anyhow. If we get the claim we may strike it rich. We are pretty lucky that way, it seems."

"If there is much gold in Good-by Gulch we will surely find some of it," Arietta remarked. "You win the prize claim, Wild, and I'll find the gold, if there is any to be found."

"All right, Et. That is a bargain. I'll hold you to it."

Things went along smoothly for the next two hours.

The miners, who were able to work in the shade, kept busy, and the shallow stream flowed on its course down the gulch.

Presently a shout went up from the neighborhood of the saloon and store, and then the rumbling of wheels came to the ears of our friends.

"Ther stage coach is comin', I reckon," said the scout, as he arose from beneath the tree he had been taking it easy under. "We may as well go and see what's goin' on, I reckon."

They were all on their feet, save Wing Wah, who was dozing peacefully in the shade, in a jiffy, and then leaving the Chinaman alone at the camp, they went over to the store.

Wild thought that was the best place to take the girls,

as he did not want them to mingle with the rough crowd at the front of the saloon.

Not only the stagecoach had arrived when they got there, but as many as a dozen horsemen had come along with it, besides the advance guard of a small wagon train.

A boom had certainly struck Good-by Gulch, and it was probably due to the advertising the owners of the Big 5 mine had done in Phoenix.

There was plenty of excitement, and two of the most pleased in the crowd were Dandy Bill and Professor Swell.

They had visions of money rolling in faster than they could count it, probably.

The keeper of the store was pleased, too, and as he talked with our friends he showed his satisfaction by making frequent remarks as to what a fine town the place would be in a very few months.

Jack Waters had come over from the mine, and when our friends saw him take a big poster that one of the passengers of the stagecoach gave him, and go and tack it on the side of the shanty saloon, they waited to get the chance to read it.

It was the announcement of the shooting match for the prize claim that was to take place on the morrow, so that made it settled that there was to be a chance for the Champion Deadshot of the West to distinguish himself.

Jack Waters soon came over to the front of the store, bringing some of the men from Phoenix with him.

An introduction took place, and then the sole topic of the conversation was the shooting match.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO MORE VILLAINS ARE ADDED TO THE LIST.

It soon got noised through the camp that Young Wild West, the Champion Deadshot, was there.

Many of the newcomers had heard of him; a few had seen him, and others were even ignorant of his existence.

But the latter soon became convinced that the boy must be a wonder in the shooting line, and those of them who had come there for the purpose of participating in the match felt that they would have no easy thing of it.

The fact was that the greater part of the contestants were there more for the purpose of showing their skill than anything else.

They did not care for the claim so much, as they figured that it would be a holding that might prove worthless.

As they went back to the camp Wild and his friends were eyed keenly, as might be supposed.

It happened that among those who had arrived with the intention of entering the shoot there were two men, who were acquaintances of Big Chock, and who were of a decidedly villainous type.

They bore the names of Happy Harry and Sawdust.

As our friends walked leisurely away from the store, after first making some purchases there, Big Chock and

his pal were busy talking to these two men, and letting them know the sort of a boy Young Wild West was.

"He don't look as though he could chuck a galoot as heavy as you are out of a place, Chock," remarked Happy Harry, shrugging his shoulders, as though he half doubted the possibility of such a thing. "Why, he ain't nothin' more than a boy."

"That's all right," was the reply. "But he's about ther strongest an' quickest galoot I ever met, man or boy. He done it, anyhow, as anyone here will tell yer."

"There ain't no mistake about it," spoke up Jug Porter. "But ther boy ain't ther only one what kin chuck a man out of a saloon. Ther big galoot called Cheyenne Charlie picked me up an' threw me out, jest as though I wasn't nothin' more'n a baby."

"Well, that's a little different. You're about eighty pounds lighter than Chock, an' it was a big, strong man what done it. Why, that galoot is six feet tall, an' I'll bet his muscles is like iron."

"So is Young Wild West's," declared Big Chock. "They must be."

"Well, it was done by sleight, more'n anything, I reckon," spoke up Sawdust. "I know a little, undersized galoot down in Tombstone, who works in a grocery. He kin pile barrels of flour three high, an' put up ther top tier jest as easy as walkin' along a sidewalk. I've seen big cowpunchers try ter do it, an' they couldn't, ter save 'em. Yet they are about twice as strong as he was. It's a way of doin' things that makes 'em easy ter do. This here Young Wild West, what's walkin' along there with that red-headed gal, must have knowed jest how he was goin' ter handle you afore he got hold of yer, Chock. Then it was easy. But that don't say so much. He might be smart, an' all that; but is he bullet proof?"

"No one seems ter know about that, I reckon," answered the big ruffian. "Of all ther talk I've heard about ther boy, I ain't heard that he's ever been shot. But I reckon he's too quick ter be shot, that's what's ther matter."

"Well," and Happy Harry grinned in a decidedly villainous way, "I reckon he'll have ter do some tall shootin' if he wants ter win that prize claim they've took so much trouble ter print big bills about. I'm somewhat of a shot myself, an' if I don't hit any bullseye they put up I'll jest swaller my rifle, that's all."

"Maybe we kin get up a bet on it," said Jug. "I'd like ter win a hundred or so."

"You jest bet all you're worth that Young Wild West won't win ther prize," Happy Harry retorted. "I know he can't beat me, though he might do as good. There's others ter be reckoned with, too. I won't be surprised if there's over a dozen in on ther game. There's Greaser Ike, which kin hold me down fur a tie every time. I've always managed ter beat him out in ther shoot-off, but there's no telling what he'll do this time."

"No, that's right, Happy," Sawdust observed. "I'm goin' ter go in for ther match, but I know I don't stand much of a chance with you. If I happen ter win it will be nothin' but luck, though. One thing about it, it'll be a safe bet that Young Wild West don't win."

"Well, whether he does or not, he's got ter go under," declared Big Chock, his brows lowering and his teeth

showing under his bristling mustache. "His doom is sealed. It's all because he chucked me out of this here joint, too. I couldn't never rest if ther young galoot got off. Why, he's lowered my reputation here, he has! Ther men around here ain't half as much afraid of me as they was afore that thing happened."

"We'll wait till after ther shootin' match, Chock," observed Jug Porter, smiling in a way that told how confident he was of doing the murderous task. "Jest leave that part of it ter me. If Young Wild West is ter go under it must be done on ther sly."

"An' if there's any galoot livin' what kin do it, it's you," nodded Sawdust. "That's a compliment, Jug; but it's dead right, jest ther same."

"Well, I know yer mean it, Sawdust," was the reply, and the snaky eyes of the villain showed a great satisfaction.

They talked on in this way, and Happy Harry and Sawdust readily agreed to do all in their power to assist Chock and his pal in getting their revenge.

"Them's putty nice lookin' gals, too," Sawdust remarked. "Too nice ter be runnin' around loose, I reckon. I like ther looks of 'em a good deal better than I do of ther show wimmen. They're out there now. Don't they think they're stunnin'?"

They might have been called that, especially by the rough men of the mining camp, for they had on their best apparel, and though it was somewhat seedy, they certainly made a show.

But it was easy for even such men to see the difference between them and the girls belonging to Young Wild West's party, as they were of a different type, altogether.

The four villains kept together the rest of the afternoon, and when night came they were the first to buy tickets for the show.

It was decided to make no move against our hero until after the shooting match for the prize claim, which was to take place the next morning at ten o'clock.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOP TAKES PART IN THE SHOW.

"Well, how about ther show to-night, Wild?" said Cheyenne Charlie, after they had eaten their supper, and it began to grow dark.

"I don't exactly know, Charlie," was the reply. "I reckon the girls don't care much about going, from what I have heard them say. How about it, girls?"

"It is just as you say, Wild," Arietta answered. "Why don't you ask the boss of the Big 5 mine if he is going to take his wife to it? If he is, I don't see why it wouldn't be all right for us to go."

"A good idea, Et. I'll go and ask him right away. His name is Jack Waters, so I heard this afternoon. I reckon we can stand for six reserved seats, if anyone in the Gulch can. But don't any of you imagine that you are going to have a treat, for it is hardly likely that the show will amount to a great deal."

"Well, that don't make any difference, so long as it is

a clean show," the scout's wife spoke up. "At first we thought it would be a little too rough, but since there are a few women here, if their husbands take them, I suppose it will be all right for us."

"If it ain't a clean show yer kin bet your life it won't finish!" the scout exclaimed. "One thing about miners is that they have respect fur their wimmen folks, generally speakin', an' this here professor knows that, maybe. We'll go, if there's any other shemales goin'."

The scout set out to find Jack Waters without any further loss of time.

By inquiring he soon found the shanty where he resided, and when he was informed that the mine boss was going, and that his wife was to accompany him, he lost no time in going to the hall and buying six seats in the second row of benches.

Professor Swell sold the tickets himself, and by the way he was beaming, the scout well imagined that he was doing a good business.

Five dollars was the price charged, but in such a place as Good-by Gulch this did not seem exorbitant.

Charlie was not long in getting back to the camp.

"Everything's all right," he said. "I've got ther tickets!"

"Is Jack Waters going to take his wife, Charlie?" Anna asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "he's got ther tickets, too."

This was satisfactory, and the girls started to get ready.

It was not much trouble to do this, but girls have a way of doing a little extra fixing when there is anything extra going on, it seems.

The show was supposed to commence at eight o'clock, and it was about that time when our friends walked up and passed their tickets to the man at the door, who was no other than the clown, with his costume and make-up complete.

The hall was large enough to hold a hundred people comfortably, and as there was not more than that number in town, there was plenty of room.

About everybody there turned out, it seemed, and the result was that more than half of them had to stand up, as there were not enough benches and chairs.

But the hall, as it was called, had been built for dancing purposes, and not to hold a show in.

There was no stage there, so one had to be made by the company.

But it happened that there was quite a supply of planking in the camp, and with the aid of some empty whisky barrels the stage was constructed.

Had it not been that this took up so much of the room the hall would have seated fifty more.

But, as we have already said, there was not as many as a hundred in the whole Gulch, so it was all right.

Wild sighted Big Chock and his pal the moment he entered, and when he saw that they were seated with two strangers it was easy for him to guess that they had found a couple of their own kind.

But the boy was not afraid that anything would happen to them while at the show.

The four men were seated in the front row, on the right, while the seats Charlie had bought called for the second row, slightly to the left.

There were half a dozen women there, and they bowed pleasantly to the girls, though they did not know them, only from what they had heard from their husbands.

But that was the Western way of it. It was not necessary for an introduction to make a person speak to you.

When Professor Swell was satisfied that he had about all the audience he could possibly get he ordered the curtain up, and then he came out with a violin.

He was not only the owner and manager of the show, but the orchestra as well.

He took his place in front of the stage and struck up playing.

There was no doubt but that he had taken lessons, and had mastered the instrument pretty well, and the music rendered by him was all that the audience could wish for just then.

The overture was applauded roundly, and the curtain, which had descended after the professor came out, went up again.

Out came a man blacked up, banjo in hand.

He was just the sort that the miners liked, for he could sing in darky style pretty well, and his jokes were good.

Then one of the young women came out and rendered two or three of the latest songs, and she received a regular ovation.

The tumblers came then, and the clown joined them.

For twenty minutes they held the audience, and then retired, while the little hall shook from floor to roof.

A twenty-minute sketch came next, and this was well received, too.

It was just about this time when Hop showed up from the rear of the hall.

The moment our friends saw him they could tell that he had been indulging in more tanglefoot than was good for him.

But when they saw him take a seat right behind the four men they had been keeping an eye on it struck them all that the clever Chinaman had something up his sleeve.

It was rather strange that Hop should come up without being interfered with, for it was not likely that he had paid five dollars for the seat.

But, anyhow, no one said anything to him. The professor was satisfied with what he had taken in, and knowing the Chinaman to be a very clever fellow was probably why he did not exact the additional amount from him.

Big Chock looked rather uneasy when he saw Hop so close to them.

No doubt he was thinking of the snake trick.

The next act went on, and Hop applauded as much as anyone.

Then, before the professor could announce what was coming next, he stood upon the bench and called out:

"Me likee makee lillie magic tick, so be."

A yell went up from those who knew his ability in that line, and then Professor Swell, who was wondering how he was going to prolong the programme, smiled and answered:

"Very glad to have you, Hop Wah. Step right up."

"Ther heathen galoot!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, in a low voice. "So that's what he come up front fur, is

it? I had an idea he was goin' ter play some kind of a trick on them sneakin' coyotes over there."

"I reckon we'll let him go ahead, Charlie," said our hero. "He certainly can amuse the audience all right."

Hop was not long in climbing upon the stage.

Then he pulled a rather small bundle from under his loose-fitting coat, and opening it, shook out a long purple robe.

It was of silk gauze, however, and no one had the least idea where he had got it from.

It was new to our friends even.

"Me gottee uncle in China whattie velly muchee smartee, so be," Hop observed, as he proceeded to put on the robe. "Me allee samee likee my uncle, so be."

He tied a cord about his waist when he had the gaudy garment on, and then his hand went beneath it and he pulled out something and clasped it to the back of his head.

Then he turned around, and it looked exactly as though he was still facing the audience, for it was a mask he had applied to the back of his head, and it looked about as much like the face of a heathen Chinese as could be for a mask.

Then he proceeded to do a little dance, and the professor caught the time and played the violin.

All this was very amusing to the miners, as might be supposed.

But our friends rather enjoyed it, too, for they knew what the clever Chinaman could do, if he tried very hard.

It is hardly necessary to say that Hop had come there prepared to show them something good.

He had caught a live rat before entering the saloon, which he, of course, visited before coming to the show, and that was in a cigar box he had under his coat.

That coat of his was such a wonderful one that there was no telling what might be brought from under it.

Hop had noticed that the money for the tickets had been placed in a cigar box exactly like the one he had.

The chances were that the money had been taken from it by this time, and that it was behind the stage.

Anyhow, he was going to call for a cigar box, to aid him in playing a magic trick.

After procuring a parasol from his mouth, and then swallowing it again, after walking around for a minute or two with it raised over his head, he looked at the professor and said:

"Me likee havee um cigar box; me wantee show something allee samee wonderful, so be."

"A cigar box!" called out the professor, rising and looking toward the back of the stage.

The clown quickly appeared with one, bowing and smirking to the purple-robed Chinaman.

"You velly nicee man, so be," said Hop, smiling at him in a patronizing way. "You stay here and allee samee helpee me."

Nothing suited the clown better, for he knew that the Celestial was an expert sleight-of-hand performer, and he wanted to learn something about it.

Hop took the cigar box, and facing the audience, with his real face, called out, shrilly:

"Everybody watchee."

Then he showed them that the box was empty.

The next thing he did was to produce his big silk handkerchief and drop to a sitting posture on the stage.

The clown added to the act by imitating his motions in a burlesque way, and the result was that there was plenty of laughter.

Hop again held up the box, which was one that holds fifty cigars, and when he had satisfied everyone that there was still nothing in it he closed the lid, and then carelessly put the handkerchief over it.

But he took considerable pains about arranging the handkerchief, however, and this is where he was getting in his fine work.

What he was doing was nothing more or less than changing the box for the one he had with the live rat in it.

Finally he went through a few mysterious motions, and then, turning to the clown, said:

"You allee samee takee uppee um handkelchief."

The funny fellow did as he was directed, acting in a very humorous way as he did so.

It was apparently the same cigar box that lay on the stage. No one dreamed anything to the contrary.

Hop arose to his feet, and pointing to the box, called out:

"Who wantee? Me allee samee puttee nicee lillee plesent in um box."

"Git out!" a skeptic bawled, from the rear of the hall. "There ain't nothin' in it."

"Me allee samee bettee fivee dollee lere is sometling in um box! Me makee go in by magic, so be."

The villain called Sawdust happened to be a "sport," and never having seen much in the line of sleight-of-hand, he arose and answered:

"I'll take that bet, heathen."

Hop quickly slipped five dollars to the clown, who stepped to the edge of the stage—there was nothing in the way of footlights there—and took a like amount from the man.

Then Hop tossed the box to Sawdust.

The villain found that the lid was nailed down, and he pulled a knife from his belt and quickly opened it.

Then it was that a rat jumped out, and with a series of squeals, started through the audience.

Benches were overturned in the efforts of the startled ones to get out of the way, and for the next five minutes there was an uproar.

Hop pocketed the money, however, and then removing his gown and mask, came down and took his place in the audience.

Everybody declared that they had got their money's worth, but the little performance Hop had given so unexpectedly was voted to be the best of all.

Professor Swell offered to hire him at the close of the show, but Hop declared that he would not leave Young Wild West for anything, and that settled that.

CHAPTER IX.

AWAKENING A CHINAMAN.

Though a watch was kept during the night, just the same as if they had been camped in some wild spot, where they were in danger of being attacked by Indians, our

friends were not disturbed, and shortly after the sun came up they were stirring.

Hop had indulged in a spree after the show, and he was the only one who slept on.

Wing prepared the breakfast, but his brother did not show up to look after the horses, as was his usual custom.

Wild and his partners did this themselves, and then they were just in time to sit down to breakfast.

It was not until after the meal was over with that Charlie made up his mind to rouse Hop.

"If I could only git hold of one of them home-made firecrackers he generally has with him I'd soon rout him," he said, with a chuckle.

"Me gittee, so be," spoke up the cook, a smile coming over his yellow countenance.

"All right; go ahead."

It was seldom that Wing took a notion to play a joke; but his brother often made him a victim of some kind of a trick, and it happened that when Hop came in late in the night he had rolled Wing from his blanket and taken his place.

Being so sound asleep, the Chinaman had not known it until morning.

Now he felt like having revenge on his brother.

He went to the tent, and finding that Hop was surely sound asleep yet, he crept in and went through that wonderful coat of his.

It was not long before he found what the scout wanted, and then out he came.

Hop claimed to have worked in a factory where fireworks were made before he left China, and whether he had or not, he certainly knew how to make crackers that would make a noise, as well as other kinds of fireworks.

The one Wing handed Charlie would hardly have been recognized as a firecracker, since it was not round in shape, but oblong, like a small box.

The fuse was there, just the same, and when Cheyenne Charlie took it the grin on his bronzed face broadened perceptibly.

"I reckon we'll give him a little taste of his own medicine," he observed. "It won't hurt nothin' in ther tent, I guess."

"Me havee pailee watee leady, if um catchee fire, so be," said Wing, cheerfully.

"Good enough! If yer have ter throw it in jest let ther most of it go on Hop. It'll be an accident, yer know. I won't let him hurt you fur doin' it."

"My blother no hurtee me," declared the cook, scornfully. "Me allee samee fightee muchee."

"Yes, yer kin fight jest about fast enough ter lick a wildcat with two sets of claws," answered the scout, sarcastically.

Wing bowed, showing that he took it as a compliment.

Charlie now went over to the tent.

Those who had already left it had put away their blankets, and there was a good chance; unless the tent got afire no damage could be done, beyond what happened to the sleeping Chinaman.

Charlie had lighted his pipe, so he was ready to set off the cracker without waiting a second.

He placed it near Hop's feet and then applied the coal in the pipe to it.

Then he slipped away.

Bang!

The cracker exploded with a noise like the report of a small cannon.

Almost immediately Hop came darting out of the smoke.

"Hip hi!" he yelled. "Whattee mattee?"

The scout was laughing heartily and the rest were surely smiling when he looked at them, and that made him understand it all.

"I reckon you'll be careful not ter lay so late ther next time, you heathen galoot," said Charlie. "Yer ought ter be ashamed of yourself. Here we've had breakfast, an' gone an' done your work fur yer."

"Lat allee light, Misler Charlie," was the reply. "Me gittee square, so be; you waitee!"

"If yer make any threats ter me I'll do somethin' worse ter yer than shootin' off one of your own firecrackers!" cried the scout, acting as though he was very much in earnest.

Two miners came running over to the camp to find out what the trouble was, while several more came around to the rear of the saloon, and were looking that way.

"Only jest been wakin' our clever heathen, that's all," Charlie told them. "He overslept himself this mornin', an' we thought we'd better wake him up kinder sudden-like. He woke all right."

Wing had rushed to the tent to see that nothing caught fire, and he now came back, grinning like a monkey.

"Whattee my blother laugh at?" demanded Hop, who felt that he ought to have satisfaction somehow.

"Me laugh when my blother allee samee gittee blowee uppee. He allee samee like blowee evelybody uppee, and when he gittee blowee uppee himself, me laugh, so be."

Hop made a dive for him, but the scout pulled a gun and cried out sharply:

"Let him alone, or off goes a couple of inches of your pig-tail, Hop!"

That stopped the slaughter, or whatever might have been going to happen.

The miners grinned and went away, no doubt thinking that there was more fun to be had with a Chinaman than they had imagined.

Hop went back to the tent and put on his regular apparel, and soon he was eating his breakfast.

But he did not have very much appetite, and he soon got through.

To punish him for going on a spree the night before, Wild set him at work polishing the metal that was on the trappings of their horses.

He kept him at it for two hours steady, and then Hop begged so hard to be let off that he told him to go.

Straight to the Red Eye saloon went the Celestial.

He had made so many friends the night before that he got invitations to have a drink from all sides.

But very few had gone to work that morning, since the shooting match was to come off at ten, and they all wanted to be present.

But Hop was not going to get too much tanglefoot aboard that day.

He went at it very mildly, and refused the many invitations he received.

As might be expected, there were four men there who disliked the clever Chinaman very much.

They were the four who had planned to kill Young Wild West after the shooting match was over.

They were at the saloon, of course, and when they saw the miners making such a lot of the "common heathen," as they called him, they decided that Hop had to be a victim, too.

But that would be easy, after Young Wild West and his partners got their medicine.

Sawdust felt sore at losing the five dollars he had wagered the night before, and he made up his mind to get it back, if there was a way to do it.

He waited until Hop came over near them, and then he nodded and observed:

"Have yer spent all that five yet, heathen?"

"Me spendee velly quicke last night, so be," was the reply.

"Well, I'll give yer a chance ter make another one, then. I'll chuck dice with yer fur a dollar a chuck."

"Allee light."

This was just Hop's hobby.

Gambling of any sort he liked, but more especially poker playing and dice.

It happened that he did not get in a game after the show, for the miners had treated him so well that he had no time for it.

They got room at the little bar and Dandy Bill gave them the dice.

Hop looked at the three little cubes and gave a nod of satisfaction.

This was not because he thought they were all right, but that he knew he had trick dice in his pocket that were about the same size.

His trick dice contained nothing but sixes and fives.

In using them one could not throw less than fifteen.

The game started, and every time the Chinaman's turn to throw came he managed to change the dice.

This was easy for him to do, since his sleight-of-hand work was quite enough for that.

The result was that he won five times in succession.

No one even thought of there being anything crooked about it, and those watching thought the Chinaman very lucky.

But Sawdust was game, and he had quite a pile of money.

"Since you're sich a lucky galoot, I'll tell yer what I'll do," he said. "I'll chuck yer fur ten dollars this time."

"Allee light," was the bland retort. "Me chuckee for um thousand dollee, if you wantee."

They all thought Hop was bluffing when he said this, but not so.

He had more than a thousand dollars on him at that minute, and he always did have, too.

His wages did not amount to very much; it was his gambling that kept him supplied with money, for he always won when he played.

He won the ten dollars, and then Sawdust doubled it.

Hop won again, and then Sawdust quit.

"I reckon you're too lucky with ther dice," he declared. "But I tell yer what I'll do. I'll bet yer a hundred that Young Wild West don't win ther shootin' match."

"Me havee takee lat bet, so be," answered Hop, with a smile that was "child-like and bland" hovering about his lips.

The money was put in the hands of Dandy Bill, and then Jack Waters came in and announced that those there, who were going to take part in the match, had better come out, as the distance and other arrangements were to be made.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHOOTING MATCH BEGINS.

Young Wild West and his partners were on hand half an hour before the shooting match was advertised to start.

As yet, none of them had entered, but that made no difference, as the entries could be made up to the time the first man was ready to shoot.

Our hero wanted to know what the target and distance were to be, and whether or not it was to be with rifle or revolver.

The big posters that had been put up did not give anything definite on this. They simply stated that it was to be a shooting match for the prize claim.

Of course the girls wanted to see it all, so it was left to Wing to guard the camp.

"I reckon we are not in a camp where crooks are so plentiful that they will run away with anything," Wild said. "This seems to be a pretty good sort of a camp, anyhow. About the worst ones in it are Big Chock and his pal, though I don't know anything about the men who came over from Phoenix."

"We'll take our chances on them, all right," the scout answered.

Wing was willing to remain there alone.

But they all knew that as far as keeping a watch was concerned he would not amount to a great deal.

He would drop off to sleep as soon as he found himself alone.

So the girls got ready shortly after Wild and his partners left, and when they got to the place where the shooting match was to take place they found quite a discussion going on as to the rules that should govern the contest.

When Arietta saw that Wild was taking part in this she shook her head and smiled.

"He don't care what the rules are," she said. "Oh! if I could only shoot like he can! And if I could only keep as cool! Surely there never was a boy like Wild."

"Of course not," Eloise declared; "nor a man, either."

"We all ought to know that," the scout's wife hastened to add. "There is Charlie, who is easily ten years older than Wild, and who has been roughing it in the wildest parts of the West since he was a little boy. He can't begin to do what Wild can. But it is all on account of his hasty temper. He can't keep cool. Why, if it wasn't for Wild I believe he would surely get shot some time."

Arietta was very proud to hear Anna and Eloise talk this way.

She certainly felt that she had the greatest boy for a lover that any girl ever had.

The wrangling continued until after the hour appointed for the match to open.

Then, when it was finally settled, Wild came over to where the girls were standing and said:

"Well, they have decided that the shooting is to be done with rifles—any make at all—and that the distance is to be two hundred yards. The target is to be set on the prize claim, with the cliff behind it to stop the bullets. It is to be but a foot in diameter, painted white, with a black round spot in the center but an inch in diameter, with a pin in the center of this. The one who hits the pin with a bullet will win the claim, unless another does the same thing with a second pin and a second bulls-eye, which would have to be fixed, in case the dead shot was made. I reckon it's pretty easy, though. But one shot to each contestant. You don't get much for the five dollars you pay."

"That's right, Wild," Arietta retorted, with a smile. "There is only one who will get his money's worth, that's sure."

"And that will be Wild," the scout's wife spoke up.

"How many are in the match?" asked Arietta.

"Seventeen is all they can get to go in it," our hero answered. "Charlie and Jim went in just to help the thing along. By listening to what is being said I find that there are only two men among the outsiders who are considered deadshots. One is named Happy Harry, who is one of the friends of Big Chock and his pal, and the other is called Greaser Ike. They both hail from Phoenix, and they came here for the purpose of winning the money, rather than the prize claim."

"Yes," said Cheyenne Charlie, as he came up just then, "an' I've jest bet a hundred that you'll win, Wild. There's half a dozen galoots over there who won't pick no man ter bet on; but they're all bettin' that you won't win."

"That probably means that there is a job put up to stop me, Charlie. I reckon you and Jim will have to be on the watch."

"Oh! we'll be right there, with our eyes wide open. You kin bet all you're worth on that! You don't shoot till after we do, so we won't have nothin' ter do but ter watch them galoots. I'll guarantee that there ain't none of 'em as will be soon enough ter drop yer, Wild. That weazen-faced sneak will be ther most dangerous one, an' it's him I'm goin' ter keep an eye on."

"Good enough, Charlie. I know I can depend on you and Jim, so I shan't bother my head about it. I am going to win the prize claim, just to show these deadshots, who have come over from Phoenix, that I can hold the title that has been given me."

"Whoopee! Wow! wow!" yelled the scout, swinging his hat. "That's ther way ter talk! There ain't no galoot livin' what kin hold a candle ter Young Wild West!"

This attracted the attention of the crowd, of course, and then some of the miners, who were loyal to our hero, and believed that he would win, joined in giving a cheer.

The target was quickly made by one of the owners of the Big 5 mine.

There was not so much to do about it, since they had the white and black paint at hand.

Wooden pails were used, and three or four of them were made, which showed that a tie was expected.

The bottoms of the pails just made the target about the right size, and all hands were satisfied.

"Boys," said Wild to Charlie and Jim, "I want you both to try and make a bulls-eye. Do the very best you can. If there is a tie, and I happen to be in it, I want you to try and win out, that's all. I don't want anyone else to beat me. But I would be perfectly satisfied to have either of you do it."

"If we tied yer we couldn't hold out on ther shoot-off," the scout answered. "You know that, Wild. We might keep on tiein' yer fur a few times; but you'd win out in ther end. You kin stay cool, an' that would make yer win out, anyhow."

"Well, never mind about that. This ain't no fancy shooting match, anyhow. It's just a plain, every-day match. A bulls-eye is a bulls-eye, whether there's a pin-head in the center of it or not. Hit the bulls-eye anywhere near the center and the pin is gone. There is nothing much in that. But I didn't have a word to say about the arrangements. I let the rest make them. I was satisfied to anything, and so were you, boys."

"Of course we were," Jim hastened to reply. "What suited you, suited us."

The prize claim was only about three minutes' walk from where they were standing, and as the crowd was all going that way now, they started after them.

About everyone in the mining camp had turned out, and when the target was finally put up near the face of the almost perpendicular cliff they lined up on either side close to the cliff, but at a safe distance from the target.

The girls went where the women were, of course, and they found the two artists of the show there.

The latter were painted and powdered to perfection, and some of the wives of the miners looked at them in a way that was almost awesome.

Such things as paint and powder they did not have—nor did they want to have them.

But to the great match that was to decide who the winner of the prize claim was to be.

The first man to shoot over the two-hundred-yard range stepped up when everything was declared in readiness by the starter.

He was a miner working under Jack Waters, and it was said that he was a very good rifle shot.

He fired and just grazed the edge of the bulls-eye.

When the result was announced, and the man had had the chance to go and see for himself, the second man stepped up.

He proved to be a poor shot, indeed, for he barely hit the target, at all.

The third did a little better, but it was nothing to brag about.

Then Happy Harry was called.

The villain stepped up in a confident way. He had a Springfield breech-loader, which was considered a very good rifle, both for distance and accuracy.

He fired, and when the result was announced it was found that he had made a bulls-eye and caused the pin-head to disappear.

A cheer went up from several, for he was known to be a good shot by those acquainted with him, and it seemed that he had made about the best that could be made.

The target was brought to him, so he might hold it, and unless there was a tie all he would have to do would be to present it and have the claim turned over to him.

Cheyenne Charlie was called when another target was placed in position, and bound to do his level best, he took a careful aim and pulled the trigger.

Crang!

His Winchester spoke sharp and clear, and then after a short wait the result was announced.

"A bulls-eye!" came the shout. "Happy Harry is tied."

"I reckon that ain't so bad," remarked the scout, as he walked over to where the girls were standing, at the same time keeping an eye on the four villains, who kept pretty close together.

"You did just what Wild told you to," his wife answered. "I am glad of that, Charlie."

"So am I glad. But I couldn't win it, not if I wanted ter. But I don't want ter, that's ther best part of it."

He meant just what he said, too, for Charlie felt that it was right that Wild should win all the contests he went into.

He was the Champion Deadshot of the West, and why should it be any other way?

Three others followed, but no one came within an inch of tying the score.

Then Jim Dart was called.

Dart had already made up his mind that he must tie Charlie and Happy Harry, though, like the scout, he had no idea of winning in the shoot-off.

He stuck to his determination and made the bulls-eye. That was the third target.

But one more had been made, so the man who had done the painting sent for more pails.

It was easy for him to convert the bottoms into targets, for he was very handy with a brush.

"Maybe we will need half a dozen or more," he said.

"Well, I reckon yer might need one more, anyhow, fur here comes Greaser Ike, ther Champion Shot of Phoenix, Arizony!" called out an admirer of the man.

It was his turn, sure enough, and in a very slouchy way he approached, holding his rifle in the hollow of his arm and expectorating tobacco juice in a way that was meant to show how unconcerned he felt about it.

He got in position and after a quick aim, pressed the trigger.

Crang!

"Another bulls-eye!" came the shout, when the judges had made an examination.

Greaser Ike went and got his target, a very pleased man.

Two others shot, both making good scores, but failing to reach the high mark, and then the name of Young Wild West was called.

The friends of each of the contestants had made more or less noise when they stepped up, but the shout that went up when the dashing young deadshot toed the mark far exceeded anything previous to it.

Cheyenne Charlie quickly satisfied himself that the villains did not mean to interfere with the boy just then, for they were not close enough.

Even Jug Porter seemed interested in the contest alone.

The new target was placed in position, and then our hero raised his Winchester and fired.

He shot quicker than any of the rest had, but when he pressed the trigger he knew he was going to make the bulls-eye, just as much as the judges knew he had when they noted the result.

"A bulls-eye, plumb through ther center of it!" came the announcement.

"Five tied fur first place," said Jack Waters, shaking his head.

"And only four more to shoot," added the man who managed the shooting match.

The four soon had their chances at it, and though they came very close, they did not reach.

That left it a tie between five of them.

It now looked as though there was going to be an exciting time in shooting it off, for there was no question but that they were all sure shots.

But the most cool one of the five was Young Wild West, and that meant a whole lot.

CHAPTER XI.

YOUNG WILD WEST'S PRIZE CLAIM.

The man, who had painted the targets, was now very busy with his brush, touching them up and plugging the holes that had gone through the bulls-eyes.

Each of the five was to have his own target to shoot at, and he had the chance to see it fixed over by the one in charge.

"I reckon a piece of cork would be about the right thing to plug the bulls-eye with," Wild remarked, as he saw the fellow whittling out plugs of wood. "A pin would go in easy, then, though I can't see as the pin amounts to anything. When a bulls-eye is made there is no more pin."

They all agreed to this, but his advice was taken, and corks were brought in play to stop the leaks in the water-pails.

The five were to shoot in the same turn as they had tied, so Happy Harry came first.

He fired and made the bulls-eye again.

A cheer went up from his friends, and those who liked his style of shooting.

"I reckon there's a chance yet," said Sawdust. "I've got jest fifty dollars left, an' I'll bet it that Young Wild West don't win ther prize."

"Me takee lat bet, so be."

Hop was right on hand, and he soon had the money in Dandy Bill's hands.

Nearly every wager that had been made was that way. The betting was all on Wild.

There were more who were ready to take this end of it than there were against him, and some of them were just taking him as they saw him shoot.

It was Young Wild West against the field, and that was all there was to it.

Cheyenne Charlie's turn came now, and he also got a bulls-eye.

Jim Dart came next, and no one was really surprised when it was announced that he had held his own with them.

He got a good share of the applause, too, and he smiled and stepped aside for the next on the list.

Greaser Ike was the man.

When the target was ready he took aim and scored a bulls-eye very easily, it seemed.

The men from Phoenix let out a howl of delight, for now they knew their favorite stood as much show as any of the rest, and they wanted to see him win, just for the honor of it.

"Young Wild West next and last!" called out the manager.

As the dashing young deadshot stepped up somebody proposed three cheers for him, and the way the crowd yelled put everything that had preceded it in the shade.

Wild coolly waited until the noise stopped, and then he lifted his rifle to his shoulder.

Crang!

The report sounded so quick this time that those looking at him could hardly believe that he had time to take aim.

But it was a dead bulls-eye, just the same.

The yelling was intense this time. Some of the miners seemed to be trying to make themselves hoarse.

"A tie ag'in," said Jack Waters. "That does beat all."

"Well," remarked our hero, with a smile, "I reckon it might keep on being a tie, if we shoot this way. This is not wonderful shooting. There are thousands of men in this country who could do the same as we have done. The best way to settle this tie is to try something more difficult."

"That's jest what I think," spoke up Greaser Ike. "I'm ther same 'pinion as Young Wild West. A bulls-eye is a bulls-eye, no matter how little it is; an' lots kin make 'em about every time they shoot. I'll bet a hundred I kin do it eight times out of ten."

No one offered to take him up.

"See here, boys," spoke up one of the owners of the Big 5 mine. "I am anxious to see who is going to get the claim. I wish the five of you would settle it as to the way the shoot-off is to finish."

"I'm satisfied ter let Young Wild West settle it," said Greaser Ike. "He's called ther Champeen Deadshot of ther West, an' he must know as much about sich things as that as anyone. I'm only ther Phoenix champion, an' so I don't come in as far as he does."

"I am called the champion, as you say," Wild spoke up, nodding to the man and smiling, for he knew he had his doubts about the title being held after the shooting was over. "But that don't say that I am the champion deadshot. In order to be a real champion a fellow must defeat all comers. As it stands now in this match there are four who have tied with me. But I am willing to anything. I will take a mile range and shoot at the smallest target that can be seen at that distance, if you say so."

"You go ahead an' settle as ter ther way it's ter be done," suggested Jim Dart.

"Yes, Wild; go ahead," Charlie added.

"I'll be satisfied ter anything yer say," declared Greaser Ike.

"So will I," said Happy Harry, for he saw that he was the only one left, and it would make little difference whether he was in favor of the suggestion or not.

"Well, since it is unanimous, suppose we shoot at a swinging target?"

Greaser Ike nodded, and then looked at Happy Harry, who did not seem to be half as pleased as he was.

Charlie and Jim were satisfied, so Wild called Hop and said:

"I want one of the old watches you have got. Pull it out, because it will soon be noon, and we don't want to hang around here in the hot sun any longer than that time."

The Chinaman nodded and quickly handed over a shiny brass watch.

"We'll make it two hundred feet, instead of two hundred yards," said the dashing young deadshot. "We'll hang the watch from the cliff with a string and start it swinging as each man is ready to shoot. In case there is a tie the string will have to be cut by a bullet to make the winner. How does that strike you?"

Happy Harry's jaw dropped.

That was a little too much for him, and he knew it.

But Greaser Ike was one of the kind who was ready to try to do anything that anyone else could, and he declared he was satisfied.

Charlie and Jim were satisfied, of course.

But they knew they would not be in it, if it came to severing the string with a bullet, while it was moving.

That Wild could do it, however, they were confident.

Those who had bet against the dashing young deadshot now began to feel as though their money was anything but sure.

But they hoped that either Greaser Ike or Happy Harry would beat him out.

They were certain that his two partners would not.

They knew that much money was on the result, and it was only natural that they should want him to win.

But no one thought that they could shoot as well as their dashing young leader, anyhow so that left Wild still the choice against the field.

Dandy Bill, who was holding several hundred dollars in stake money, had not made a wager himself yet; but he now stepped out in an open spot, and holding up his hand, said, loud enough for everyone to hear:

"I'll bet a thousand dollars that Young Wild West wins ther prize claim."

There was a deep silence.

No one made a reply.

"What's ther matter with yer, boys?" and the saloon-keeper laughed. "Ain't gittin' scared, are yer? Well, I'll make another proposition, then. I'll bet five hundred that Cheyenne Charlie beats Greaser Ike; an' I'll bet another five hundred that Jim Dart beats Happy Harry! How does that strike yer?"

The two contestants he had named against Wild's partners promptly stepped up.

Each was ready to back himself on that proposition, and the bets was quickly made, Jack Waters holding the stakes.

"If anybody wants some of ther same kind of money don't be afraid ter speak out."

"I reckon you're too lucky, Bill," said one, shaking his head. "I wouldn't bet ag'in yer."

No one else wanted any of it, so Wild proceeded to have the watch hung up the way he wanted it.

It was soon hanging at the end of twelve feet of string.

One of the judges agreed to start it swinging as the word was given by Waters, and then Hop nodded and smiled in his childish way.

"Me allee samee losee um nicee gold watch, so be," he said.

But there was no one there who believed the watch was gold.

There was a laugh, instead of anything like sympathy shown.

Happy Harry took the first shot, the same as before, because he had been the first to make a bulls-eye.

He made a miss of it, and with an exclamation of disgust, he threw down his rifle.

Then Cheyenne Charlie came up, and when he hit the watch a shout went up that could have easily been heard over a mile.

Dandy Bill played with the ends of the mustache he took so much pride in and smiled serenely.

Jim Dart came next, and when he hit the watch the shouting was repeated.

"There's one five hundred I win," said Dandy Bill, and he went to Jack Waters and got the money he had won on Jim.

Greaser Ike came up now, but it could be seen by his friends that he lacked the confidence he had shown previously.

He was a little longer than the rest had been in firing, but when he did fire he missed the watch.

Unlike Happy Harry, he smiled good-naturedly.

"We ain't ter be put in ther same class with Young Wild West and his pards," he said. "It's all right, boys. I done my best, an' I've lost."

The man got a cheer for this.

He was not a hard loser, and the crowd appreciated what he said, and the way he acted.

The watch was examined by those interested.

One bullet had hit the case near the edge, but had not knocked it out of shape any, and the other had passed through near the center.

It was Jim who had made that shot, and he felt rather proud when Eloise congratulated him for it.

When it came our hero's turn to try he received an ovation that lasted three or four minutes.

But he waited calmly, never once losing a bit of his remarkable coolness.

Finally he stepped up; the judge gave the watch the same kind of a swing as he had done for the rest, and the boy's Winchester flew to his shoulder.

Crang!

As the report rang out the watch was seen to jump back and hit the face of the cliff.

"Hold on!" cried Wild, holding up his hand before the result could be announced. "I hit the watch about an inch below the ring. Just see if that is not right."

"Correct!" came the shout a moment later from the two judges.

Then there was a rush to see the watch.

"I reckon that really settles it," one of the judges said. "Young Wild West was the only one who called out his shot."

"No," and Wild shook his head. "My partners hit the watch, and I want them to shoot it off with me. We will now try to cut the string close to the ring of the watch."

When everything was ready Charlie stepped up and tried.

He failed, though he was sure he had not missed it by more than a quarter of an inch.

But he might as well have missed it by a dozen feet, for all the good it did him.

Jim tried, and he, too, missed.

"I knew I couldn't do it," he declared. "But I am sure Wild can."

"If he cuts that little string with a bullet he's ther Champion Deadshot all right," called out Greaser Ike.

Wild was just as confident of doing it as he was that he could pull the trigger.

His Winchester was true, and he had fired it so many times that he understood it perfectly.

He called out that he was ready and the watch was started swinging, the same as before.

Up went the rifle, and the boy's cheek no sooner rested upon the stock than——

Crang!

As the report rang out the watch dropped to the ground.

That settled it. Young Wild West had won the shooting match and the prize claim was his!

The official announcement was given, and then for the next ten minutes our hero was busy receiving congratulations.

While this was going on Charlie and Jim were watching the four villains keenly. But none of them showed a disposition to do anything against the victor.

"Now then," said Wild, "I reckon we'll try and dig out some of the gold of Good-by Gulch."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOLD OF GOOD-BY GULCH.

The prize claim was only about a quarter of a mile from the heart of the little settlement, and the creek ran through the eastern edge of it.

Nearly a mile to the west the property owned by the Big 5 mine syndicate extended, and the site for the proposed smelter was almost adjoining it.

When the crowd had dispersed Wild called Hop and said:

"I reckon we may as well move up here. We'll stay here a day or two, anyhow. If there is anything here we ought to find it in that time. Just wake up that sleepy brother of yours and break camp. Load the pack-horses and move up here. I want the tents put up right where the targets were located. Do you understand, Hop?"

"Me allee samee undelstand, Misler Wild," was the quick reply. "Me hully uppee, so be."

Away he went, no doubt feeling that he ought to be lively and cheerful to make up for his actions of the night before.

There were half a dozen trees growing on the claim, and as they happened to be near the cliff, it was an admirable place for a camp.

The ground was of a very uneven formation just there, and the big rocks and banks of earth were numerous.

The nearest shanty to the claim was probably three hundred yards distant, but that made no difference to our friends, even though it might suit their enemies.

Wild had quite a talk with those who were booming the camp, and he found them to be men, who, though looking for the chance to make fortunes, were honest and anxious to give those a chance who came there to work.

In half an hour the camp had been shifted, and then there was little to do but to settle down and take things easy.

But after they had eaten a rather late dinner it occurred to our hero that it would not be a bad idea to do a little prospecting about the claim.

Arietta was eager to take part in this, for she firmly believed that if there was any gold there, worth the while, she was going to be the one to discover it.

"I reckon we'll have ter strike somethin' in ther way of meat afore to-morrer," Charlie observed, as he picked his teeth with a match, after filling in with a good, square meal. "Ther venison is about gone, an' we ain't had no bear meat in three or four days. Quail an' partridges is all right; but too much of it ain't no good. I'm a little tired of that sort of feed."

"Well, there ought to be plenty to shoot up there," and our hero pointed to the mountainside above them. "I reckon you and Jim can go out and try your luck before night, if everything seems to be all right. I am going to let Hop watch our enemies."

"And the rest of us will look for the gold," spoke up Arietta.

"I reckon you'll have ter look putty hard," answered the scout, with a laugh. "If ther owners of ther land here thought there was much that was worth while they wouldn't have put up ther claim fur ther prize in a shootin' match. I feel mighty sartin of that."

"Maybe they don't know much about it, Charlie," said Wild. "Jack Waters says there's plenty of the yellow stuff in the ground around here. The most of it is found in streaks a foot or so below the surface, while placers that pay well are plentiful. Anyhow, everybody seems to be doing well here, and that speaks pretty well for the place."

Arietta was so eager to go ahead with the prospecting that about two in the afternoon they set out to make a search of the surface of the claim area.

Cheyenne Charlie called Jim, and taking their rifles, the two set out to do a little hunting.

It was evident that neither of them had much faith in striking it rich on the prize claim.

Wild had seen much of mining life, and he had prospected when he was only fourteen.

He knew pretty well what kind of soil there was where gold was to be found, and he soon became convinced that there ought to be gold there.

With the girls following him, one of them carrying a pan to collect what might be found, and the others with a pick and shovel, he struck out to make a search.

Down along the foot of the cliff he led the way, and presently he stopped in a little hollow that was almost entirely surrounded by the rocks and the face of the cliff.

"I reckon this looks all right," he said, pointing to the ground. "Go ahead, girls. You want to work, so now is your chance. I'll get up here and watch out for our enemies."

The girls were almost as muscular as they were pretty, and they did not mind a little hard work.

Soon the clanging of the pick as it struck the hard ground was heard, and then the scraping of the shovel sounded.

The scout's wife insisted on wielding the pick, and she did it in the proper way, too.

Wild could see down into the mining camp plainly.

Some of the miners were at the saloon having a good time, for they had been paid their wages, and there was no doubt but that Dandy Bill was now reaping a harvest.

Occasionally he could see some of them outside in the street, but never once did he see anything of Big Chock or his friends.

"I reckon the galoots are afraid to do anything in the daylight," he muttered. "To-night will be the time when we'll have to be on the watch for them. Jug Porter, as they call him, may try to sneak right into the camp and do some damage. Well, he'll have to be mighty sly about it if he does it."

For half an hour the girls worked away, and then suddenly a shout went up from Arietta.

"Here we are, Wild!" she called out. "I have found it. A pocket is here, and if I am any judge the nuggets are worth a hundred dollars apiece."

The boy quickly went down to them.

About a foot below the surface what seemed to be a virgin vein had been found by the girls.

None of them were so much excited that they lost control of themselves.

They waited until the boy had examined some of the little lumps that had been chipped out by the sharp pick.

"It's all right, girls," he said, rising to his feet, with a couple of pounds of the stuff in his hand. "You have struck the gold of Good-by Gulch, all right. This will assay over five thousand to the ton, and I'll bet on it!"

Arietta swung her hat and led in a rousing cheer.

They all knew it was through her that the gold had been found, and they were not slow to give her the credit.

"If that streak extends more than twenty feet, which I think it does," said our hero, "I reckon it was worth while to win the shooting match. That is enough now, girls. There is no use in working until you get tired out. It is too warm a day for that. To-morrow we'll put some of this in bags and get Jack Waters to send up a team for it. Then we'll know what to do."

"I am satisfied," Arietta answered. "But I was certain that there was something here, Wild. I got it in my head, and I could not think any other way, if I tried."

"Well, your luck sticks right to you, little girl," was the reply.

Wild did a little work himself, and by the time Charlie

and Jim came back he had gathered quite a pile of nuggets that ranged in weight from two ounces to half a pound.

The ore was so rich that he felt that he had underestimated the value of the find.

But he did not get the least bit excited over it.

Young Wild West was quite used to that sort of thing.

The scout and Dart had shot a few birds and one mountain sheep, so they had succeeded in what they set out to do, too.

They were much surprised, as well as delighted at the discovery of the gold on the prize claim, but they, like Wild, took it without any degree of excitement.

Probably if they had not been well fixed in the way of mining interests it might have been different.

They had simply added more to their wealth, that was all.

Hop came around when it was time for supper.

He had kept himself very straight during the day, and when he reported that the four men he had been watching had not left the saloon Wild could not imagine just what they were up to.

But he made up his mind that they must be watched that night, however.

After supper Wild and Charlie went down to the saloon.

They met Jack Waters, and our hero told him that they had struck it rich on the prize claim.

"I want you to send up a wagon and fetch down a ton of the ore to-morrow morning," he told him, and the mine boss opened his eyes.

"I had an idea that there was somethin' there," he said. "But I didn't think it could be found without sinking a shaft. I'm glad yer struck it, fur ther more gold that's found here in ther Gulch the quicker it will build up, an' that's what we're after."

It seemed that Waters could not keep the information to himself, and in less than an hour it was generally known throughout the camp that Young Wild West had struck it rich on the prize claim.

Some refused to believe it, but those who did thought it was great luck, indeed.

Many were the questions asked Wild and Charlie, but they did not give out any information that amounted to anything.

"The claim is for sale," was about all our hero said.

He had been given the papers making him the owner of it as soon as they could be filled out and signed, after he had been declared the winner in the shooting match; but being under age, he could not legally sell the claim, unless it was transferred to the purchaser by those who had deeded it to him.

But this could be done all right; there was no doubting that.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FOUR VILLAINS FORM A PLOT.

Big Chock no sooner saw Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie down at the saloon than he began to think of a way to fix the boy and his partners.

He called upon his pal to think up a scheme that would work, and he promised to do so.

But in the meantime they heard about the strike that had been made on the prize claim, and that made them have a desire to profit by it.

It was not difficult for Jug Porter to get all the information that was known, and while our hero and Charlie were talking to a gathering of men outside Chock got his three friends together and they talked it over.

"I'll tell yer what my advice is, Chock," he said, putting on a very wise look. "If we don't bother 'em to-night they'll sorter think that we ain't goin' ter do nothin'. Then to-morrer mornin' we'll sneak up there afore it gits daylight an' lay fur a chance. They say that Jack Waters is goin' ter send up a big wagon ter git it full of gold, which Young Wild West an' his pards is goin' ter bag up. This won't be done until they've had a chance ter git it ready, which won't be much afore noon, I reckon. Now, if we kin make it appear that we've gone ter Phoenix, by strikin' out with our horses jest afore daylight, we kin leave ther horses somewhere an' sneak around an' find a place ter wait in till ther proper time comes. We kin put on masks, so if ther gals sees us, which they surely will, they won't know who we are. Then we kin kill ther boy an' his pards an' git away with what gold we kin carry. If we work it right we'll git ther whole business that's been taken on."

"That sounds putty good," observed Chock. "What do yer think about it, boys?"

The boys referred to were Happy Harry and Sawdust, of course.

"Jest suits me," answered the former, quickly. "I reckon I want ter fix that gang, if fur nothin' more than because they beat me in ther shootin' match. I ain't got no reputation fur bein' a crack shot no more. They made me look mighty small in that line, I reckon."

"They sartinly did," nodded Sawdust; "an' they made my pile putty small, too. I lost every bet I made, besides lettin' that heathen galoot win money from me with ther dice. Oh! I'm in on ther game. But I don't think we kin git away with much of ther gold. It's ther revenge we want, more'n anything."

"That's it!" exclaimed Big Chock, a fiendish light glinting in his eyes; "it's revenge what we want."

"Let me see," went on the sneaky one, a happy smile on his face at having his idea taken up so readily. "We all want ter look alike, if we kin. We'll mask ourselves, which is mighty easy, fur handkerchiefs will do that, jest by cuttin' a couple of holes in 'em fur ter see through. Then we ought ter have hats alike. That's ther way I would do it. There mustn't be anything about us that would give 'em ther least chance ter think it was us."

"We kin git hats alike by jest stealin' 'em from them that's got 'em alike," said Big Chock. "There's enough alike what's wore by them galoots of ther Big 5 mine. If we can't git hold of four afore mornin' I'll be mightily surprised."

"That's right," nodded Jug. "I'll git ther hats. Well, is it understood that we're ter do it that way, then?"

"Yes," answered Happy Harry.

"Sartin sure," Big Chock hastened to add.

"An' we kin come back a little later on an' take charge

of them gals," said Sawdust. "They'll sorter need someone ter protect 'em, I reckon."

There was a laugh at this, as might be supposed.

All four were heartless villains, and what would have seemed a horrible outrage to many was but a joke to them.

The plot was talked over and over until finally they thought they had it down so fine that nothing would stop them carrying it out.

It was even decided that Big Chock was to go to Young Wild West and assure him that he held no grudge against him.

Pretty soon our hero and the scout came into the saloon with Jack Waters and two of the owners of the Big 5 mine.

Almost at the same time Hop came in by the back way.

It would soon be time for the show to go on, and about all there meant to take it in again that night, since the professor had given it out that there was to be a change in the programme.

Wild shot a glance about the room and saw the four villains together.

He had an idea that they were up to something, so he was not surprised when Big Chock came up in a meek sort of a way and said:

"Young Wild West, I've sorter got an idea that yer think I'm down on yer. But I want yer ter know that I ain't. I ain't got no grudge ag'in yer, 'cause I know you're too much fur me. From what I have heard since yisterday, I reckon it ain't no disgrace ter be knocked down an' chucked out of a saloon by you. I'm goin' ter call it quits, so you kin bet that I won't never bother with yer ag'in."

"All right, Chock," answered the boy, in his cool and easy way. "I reckon you'll be all right, if you stick to that. But I want to let you know that I don't care whether you mean what you say or not. If you feel like tackling me any time you are welcome to go ahead."

"Well, I wouldn't do it, not if I felt like it, so that settles that."

"All right, then. I reckon that will be about all."

The big ruffian walked away, not very well satisfied with the way his words had been received, but thinking that they had done some good, anyhow.

He was seen to talk to his companions, and then Jug Porter arose and came over.

"What Chock jest said is my sentiments exactly," he declared, before the gathering in the place. "You chucked me out too easy fur anything, Cheyenne Charlie. But don't think I'm down on yer fur it. I've got a great respect fur yer, if I didn't have afore yer done it."

"You sneakin' coyote! I don't want yer ter tell me anything like that," retorted the scout, hotly. "Jest git back there with your gang, or I'll pick yer up and throw yer over."

Jug got out of the way in a hurry.

Probably he was satisfied that he might better have not said anything.

Meanwhile, Professor Swell had joined Hop at a table, and the two were talking very earnestly.

Wild heard Hop say "no" two or three times, and then he stepped over.

"What's the trouble here?" he asked.

"Um pofessee wantee me to helpee to-night, Misler Wild. "Me say me no can do it."

"Well, that's right. You can't. Not that I care about his helping you, Professor Swell," and he turned to the showman. "But he is pretty sure to get in trouble if he is allowed to go ahead and show what he can do. He will be better off by keeping out of it, and so will you. I reckon I know what I am talking about."

"Well, if you think that way, Mr. West, I shan't urge him any more."

"I do think that way. You can get just as big a house without him, that's sure."

"Oh, yes! The people here are using me nicely. I have no fault to find."

The professor looked at his watch.

It lacked a quarter of an hour before the performance was to begin.

But as the seats had been sold before this, and he had the money in his pocket, there was no hurry.

He invited Wild and those in his company to sit down around the table and have something.

They all accepted the invitation.

The professor called for whisky, and being in an accommodating mood, Dandy Bill brought over a full bottle and the glasses.

Hop decided to have some fun with the professor, so unseen by anyone, he dropped a pinch of whitish powder in the glass that was set before him.

Wild took a cigar, as was his custom generally, though he seldom smoked all he got.

The clever Chinaman pushed the bottle to the professor, after first helping himself.

But the showman insisted on the rest being supplied first, and this was done.

Then he tipped the bottle and poured some of the contents in his glass.

There was a sudden hissing noise and a cloud of steam arose that shut him from the view of the rest for the moment.

"Whattée mattee?" cried Hop, in alarm, and then, before his act could be observed, he grabbed the bottle and hid it under his coat.

All but Wild and the scout were greatly surprised at what had happened.

Hop had simply put a chemical of some kind in the glass, and the whisky had caused it to create the disturbance.

Our two friends knew that as well as if they had been told.

The majority of those present laid it all to the Chinaman, of course, for they had seen about enough of him to know that he was likely to do anything.

Dandy Bill hurried to the table.

He looked around for the bottle.

It was not to be seen.

"What's ther matter, professor?" he asked, a grin creeping over his face.

"The—the Chinaman played a joke on me, I guess," was the reply.

"Yes, that's right, I s'pose. But what did yer do with ther bottle?"

"I—I don't know."

Hop arose and started to go out. But Wild knew he must have the bottle, so he ordered him to produce it.

He did so quickly enough, and then the incident blew over.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GAME OF DRAW POKER.

Wild and Charlie did not attend the show that night, but went back to the camp, leaving Hop there to watch the movements of the four men.

The Chinaman had promised that he would keep sober, and he meant to keep his word, as he knew much depended on how he carried himself.

When he saw the quartet go into the show he went, too, and when it was over, and they returned to the saloon, he was right on hand.

He was anxious to get into a game of poker, but he did not want it to interfere with his watching.

Finally he got near the villains, and when he saw them getting ready for a game among themselves he could not help asking if they would allow him to come in.

Sawdust was simply delighted, for he thought they might easily fleece the Chinaman, no matter how sharp he might be.

He played with Happy Harry as his partner, anyhow, and between the two of them, they generally managed to win most of the pots.

One would deal the cards so the other got the best hand out, and then it was bound to work.

Jug Porter was a very cunning player, too. He had the reputation of being able to deal what he liked, and whenever he took the notion.

So clever was he that he had never been caught cheating since he had come to Good-by Gulch, though almost everyone knew that he did cheat.

Hop knew he had four players to deal with who would surely relieve him of his cash by fair means or foul, providing they had their way about it.

But he did not mean to allow them to have their way about it.

"I s'pose you're a hummer at ther game, heathen?" queried Big Chock.

"Me play pletty nicee," was the reply. "Me winnee plenty money play dlaw pokee, so be."

"I expect so," the big villain answered, and he winked at his companions. "Yer know how ter put up ther cards, I s'pose."

"Me no cheatee," declared Hop, shaking his head. "You catchee me cheatee, you allee samee cuttee off my pig-tail, so be."

"All right. That's a fair offer. Now, look out for your pig-tail."

"Me lookee outee."

A new deck of cards was brought to them, but as the house had no chips, money was used in all the games played there.

Hop liked this way the best, anyhow, as sometimes he had to get out in a hurry, and did not have time to cash his chips.

The cards were shuffled by Jug Porter, and then the cut for deal was made.

Jug won, since he knew just where to cut an ace, and none of the rest happened to strike one.

Hop sat next to him, and when he was called upon to put up an ante he slipped up two silver dollars.

The cards were dealt around, and then the four men exchanged glances.

Hop did not appear to notice this, but he knew almost to a certainty that Big Chock was going to hold the winning hand.

But he was willing to let it go that way.

He found that he had three kings cold, so when it came his say he raised it over the lift Big Chock gave.

The others dropped out, and it went along until there was as much as fifty dollars on the board before they drew cards.

Hop called for five cards, instead of only three, and Jug Porter looked surprised.

"I want four cards," spoke up Big Chock, who was holding an ace, with the expectation of getting in the other three.

He tried to take the cards that were dealt out first, but Hop was too quick for him.

He got the remaining ace, of course, but there was not a pair to go with it.

Both he and the dealer knew that Hop must have drawn two aces, so that would make it even up, save that a single king next to the pair would win.

There was no use, so when Hop bet ten dollars Big Chock threw down his hand.

"Lat velly nicee lillee pot, so be," remarked the clever Celestial, as he raked it in.

Satisfied with having beaten Big Chock and his pal at their own game, he now made up his mind to show them something about dealing good hands.

Happy Harry cut the deck, but Hop put it back just as it was without being discovered.

Then he dealt around the five cards each.

Big Chock got four kings, Happy Harry four queens, Sawdust four jacks and Jug Porter four tens.

Hop, of course, kept the four aces for himself.

The ante was a dollar, but this was raised until there was a cool hundred on the table, and then they drew cards.

Happy Harry stood pat, Jug drew one card, Big Chock declared he didn't want any and Sawdust took one.

Hop acted as though he was dismayed at this, but made out that he had overcome it, and then, after hesitating a moment, he said:

"Me takee two cards."

Hop took two cards, but he picked up the two he had discarded, however.

It was done so neatly that no one was the wiser.

As each of the four thought he must hold the winning hand, there was no backing down from any of them.

They managed to exchange glances and make it understood that they were to divide the pot, no matter which one of them won it.

Then the betting got going at a lively rate.

Miners crowded around, because it was about as swift a game as they had seen in some time.

Hop raised it every time it came his turn, and the others went right along.

But when about three thousand dollars was on the table the villains began to lose heart.

What if the Chinaman should hold four aces?

That was the question that was going through their minds.

Then, again, how was it possible that he could draw them, when he had discarded two cards, and they had fooled him on the draw?

"Me allee samee makee huddled more, so be," said Hop, calmly, and he coolly lighted a cigar.

"I'll call yer!" answered Big Chock. "If you've got a hand that'll beat mine yer must have cheated ter git it."

"Me gottee four lillee aces!"

The big ruffian jumped to his feet and whipped out his gun.

Bang!

It was not the weapon that spoke, but the cigar that Hop had dropped on the table exploded.

A cloud of smoke went up and the clever Chinaman grabbed the money and stuffed it in his pocket.

Hop felt sure that he dared not go back, so there was only one thing for him to do, and that was to stay outside and watch.

It was about half an hour before daylight when he saw the four men he wanted go to the stable.

Hop was right on their trail.

He listened to what they were talking about, and soon found out that they were going to make a pretext of leaving the mining camp to ride over to the city.

"Me watchee velly muchee goodee, so be," he muttered. "Me no lettee Misler Wild gittee shootee in um dark. Me allee samee velly smartee Chine!"

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Wild and Charlie turned in as soon as they got back to the camp on the prize claim, leaving Jim to stand guard duty until twelve.

When twelve came Charlie relieved Jim, and at half-past two Wild took Jim's place.

But there was no need of a watch, since the villains had planned to do their work after daylight, as the reader knows.

Breakfast was eaten shortly after the sun came up, with no signs of Hop.

They were all a little anxious about him, so when Jim declared that he was going to look for him Wild assented.

Jack Waters had supplied our hero with half a dozen leather sacks to put the ore in, and when Charlie struck in after breakfast to get out the nuggets Wild proceeded to fill the sacks.

Arietta came over to the hollow just then, rifle in hand.

"Wild," said she, "I am going to the top of the cliff to have a look around. If I see anything to shoot I'll try my luck."

"Well, take Wing with you, then. He can carry the game, if you get any. But I wouldn't go out of sight of the camp, if I were you. You know we have enemies, and that something is likely to happen."

This being settled, she set out at once, the cook following.

Arietta went around and was soon ascending the cliff.

She had just reached the top when who should confront her but Jim and Hop.

"So you found him, eh, Jim?" the girl asked. "What has he been doing all night?"

"Watching our four enemies, Arietta," replied the boy. "Hop has done remarkably well. Even now Big Chock and his friends are creeping to the camp to shoot down all who are there. As we know just where they are, we are going to stop their work from the top of the cliff. You will come in handy, for you are a sure shot."

The four now approached the edge of the cliff, Jim taking care that they kept well out of sight by aid of the rocks and stunted bushes.

But it will be in order to see what was going on down below.

The four masked villains had crept up until they were within a few feet of Charlie and our hero; and with but a big rock separating them.

They all looked alike, since their hats and masks made them that way.

Each held a revolver in his hand, and it was evident that they meant to make short work of the two they had managed to reach.

The conversation that was being carried on by the two pleased them greatly.

Cheyenne Charlie and Wild were busy filling the leather sacks with the rich ore when four masked men suddenly popped into view from behind a big rock near them.

At the same moment Arietta appeared at the top of the cliff, followed by Jim and the Chinamen.

"Hands up, you villains!" came the shout from the cliff above them, and the villains forgot their purpose, for the time, and turned and looked.

Wild and the scout were as much surprised as they were, but they rolled quickly under the shelter of the rock.

Crang! Crang!

Two rifle shots rang out in quick succession.

A yell of fear and rage sounded, and then hurrying footsteps told the young deadshot and his partner that the enemy was departing.

Wild jumped from behind the rock, and he was just in time to see two of the masked men caught in a cul de sac but a few yards away.

They had run the wrong way, and now they were in a trap.

Happy Harry and Jug Porter had been shot by Jim and Arietta, as they were reaching over the rock to shoot at our hero and the scout, so that left Big Chock and Sawdust to fight it out now.

The latter, finding that he had not time to climb up the slippery rock to get where he might run away, turned his revolver at Wild and fired.

But the boy dropped before the bullet got there, and then his own weapon spoke.

Sawdust went down.

Then it was that Big Chock threw up his hands and cried out for mercy.

Cheyenne Charlie ran over to him in a hurry.

He quickly disarmed him and tore off the mask.

"I thought it was you, you big galoot!" he exclaimed.

"Don't kill me!" pleaded the scoundrel, his eyes shining with fear. "I'll reform if you'll let me go!"

"You'll never reform if you wait for that, you sneaking coyote!" spoke up our hero, as he joined them. "Fetch him along, Charlie. He is all that is left of the four, but he may as well have a good look at the gold of Good-by Gulch."

Arietta and Jim were not long in getting down from the cliff, and with Anna and Eloise, they came upon the scene.

The latter two had been much frightened by the firing, and not knowing what to do, they had hid themselves behind the rocks until those from the cliff came to them.

In a few minutes all but the cook went down with the prisoner.

The miners were just thinking of going to their work, and when they saw Big Chock being led by Cheyenne Charlie they knew that something had happened.

Wild did not delay in telling what the shooting on the prize claim meant.

He let them know all about it in a few words.

A crowd hurried to the spot where the three dead ones lay, and when the masks were torn from their faces a howl went up.

"Big Chock turned bandit, did he?" said Jack Waters. "He wanted to kill Young Wild West and his pard, did he? Well, I reckon yer know what that means, boys?"

The boys knew.

The reader does, too, so there is no use in describing what took place.

This about finishes our story.

Young Wild West sold the prize claim to those who had put it up for a prize, the price being a nice little sum, which he divided equally with his companions, the Chinamen included.

Some of the gold of Good-by Gulch they took with them when they left at the end of the week, just to have something to remind them of the prize claim that had been won by the wonderful shooting of Young Wild West.

When they left in search of new and fresh adventures Professor Swell's show was still doing business, and with a prospect of remaining there for a while.

"So, as Wild is in the habit of saying, 'I reckon that will be about all.'"

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST BOOMING A TOWN; or, ARIETTA AND THE LAND SHARKS," which will be the next number (346) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

In Oakland County, Michigan, a girl was skating on a frozen lake when a bulldog belonging to the driver of a team passing on the highway started out to pull her down. She saw him coming, but didn't scream or faint. She simply started off on a straight line for an air hole, and when near it she swerved aside. The ice was so slippery that the dog couldn't dodge, but kept right on and went into the hole and was drowned. Even \$50 dogs make mistakes now and then.

One of the most wonderful clocks in existence is now in the possession of Louis Desoutter, who has had the honor of taking it to Buckingham Palace for inspection by the Queen. Her majesty showed great interest in its beautiful mechanism. The clock is fixed on a Louis Seize stand and has four faces. Besides marking the hours, it shows the tides at six different parts of the world, the mean time and the solar time, the age of the moon, the movements of the planets, all eclipses, and is a perpetual calendar. It was made by Janvier of Paris in 1789 for the French Academy, and took eleven years to manufacture; the workmanship is magnificent.

There are many remarkable towns in Mexico, but none more interesting than Guanajuato, "The Hill of the Frog." It might more properly be called the "gold brick town," for the houses have been found to contain much gold. This is a curious situation, but it came about naturally. Guanajuato—pronounced Wah-nah-wahto—is one of the oldest mining towns in Mexico; but the value of the place as a town was discovered when a railroad company decided to build a station there. It was found necessary to tear down about 300 adobe buildings, which were made of the refuse of various mines after the ore was extracted. When it became known that the old adobe buildings would be torn down pieces taken at random were assayed. It was found that because of the old process, which had much gold and silver, they assayed from \$3 to \$24 a ton. The mean value was estimated to run about \$8 gold a ton. The old buildings have brought about \$30,000 Mexican in gold, and persons who have built since the new machinery has been installed in the mines are bemoaning the fact that the new houses do not contain as much gold as the old.

The famous blarney stone is firmly embedded in a massive tower of Blarney Castle, located in the village of Blarney, about four miles northwest of Cork, Ireland. The castle was built by Cormac McCarthy in 1449. There remains of the

castle only the tower above mentioned. A legend asserts that after McCarthy had built this castle he chanced one day to save an old woman from drowning, who, to show her gratitude, offered him a golden tongue which should have the power of fluent persuasiveness—a tongue that could influence men and women, friends and foes, as he willed. To get this power, however, Cormac must climb to the tower of the castle, let himself down from the parapet in some difficult way, and kiss a certain stone in the wall situated about five feet below the parapet running round the top. It is said that he followed the old woman's directions, kissed the stone, and at once was endowed with all the persuasive eloquence which had been promised him. The original blarney stone can only be kissed by a person bending over the parapet, and being safely held there by an assistant clutching his heels.

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

Little Evelyn, not yet three years old, had learned to spell "c-a-t, cat." In the first flush of triumph, she exclaimed, "Won't the cats be surprised!"

Customer—"How does it happen that these things have suddenly gone up fifty per cent?" New Boy (amused at customer's ignorance)—"Why, haven't you heard? The tariff duty of these things have gone up five per cent."

A story in which Webster is said to have figured: The statesman was once asked by a woman at a dinner given in his honor, how he varied in his eating, and what he generally ate. "Madam," the answer ran, "I vary in eating in this respect; sometimes I eat more, but never less."

"You and that little Wattles boy seem to play very nicely together," said Johnny's mother. "I am glad there is one boy in the neighborhood that you can get along with." "Yes," replied Johnny, "I lick him every morning and then he's nice to me all day."

Daughter—"Pa, you remember you told me to save all the pieces of string from store packages and wind them into a ball." Economical Pa—"Yes, my dear. Did you?" Daughter—"Every bit, and it makes the cutest little ball you ever saw. Now I'm going to knit a handy little bag to put it in. Give me a dollar and a fifty cents for zephyr, please."

An English naturalist was showing his fine collection of spiders to some American friends. All at once they were alarmed to see that a giant specimen had escaped from his case and was approaching them. One of those present, a Philadelphia physician, had the presence of mind to jump up and kill the animal. "What a pity," exclaimed the English naturalist. "Do you know that was a very rare species of spider?" "Never mind," returned the culprit, "I've made it rarer."

Albert Chevalier, the famous coster singer, while recently performing in a provincial English town, was much gratified at what he considered the very cordial reception he had received from the audience. "I'm delighted they liked the performance," he remarked to the manager afterward. "I never heard such a banging of sticks and umbrellas on the floor in my life." The manager leaned back and laughed. "That wasn't applause, old chap," he told him; "the local postoffice is on the floor above us, and that was stamping letters for the mail."

A SILENT AVENGER

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG.

The author of this sketch once had an experience during the anti-rent troubles in this country which is well worth making a note of.

The early settlers of the state of New York, particularly that region in the neighborhood of Albany, had in many instances given leases of farms running ninety-nine years, and renewable if desired.

At the end of that time the descendants of the original lessees, claiming that their long tenure had entitled them to ownership, refused in many instances to give up the property or to take a new lease.

Of course their claims were not just, for there had been abundant opportunity for them to have bought their farms over and over again, and at that time, having vastly increased in value, it was not likely that the heirs of the original owners were going to yield to their demands, and give up the farms to the lessees.

Hence arose the anti-rent troubles, and the formation of large parties, who argued their claims at the muzzle of the musket, and went about in disguise, shooting the landlords, and holding meetings where the most incendiary speeches were made.

Gottlieb Vanderdonk was one of the original Dutch settlers, and, having considerably more land than he knew what to do with, had it surveyed, staked out in lots or farms of fifty acres each, built a road through his tract, established a settlement, and leased his small farms.

They were let out at a trifling rent on ninety-nine year leases, and even before the old man's death had greatly increased in value.

Some of the tenants bought their farms, but others thought it was more shrewd to pay a trifling rent, and make more money, than to buy the farms outright.

Ninety-nine years passed by, and Edward Davenport owned a number of valuable farms, for which he received an annual rental vastly incommensurate with their actual worth.

Notwithstanding this, many of his tenants claimed that the farms belonged to them, and would neither give them up nor take out a new lease.

Mr. Davenport maintained a firm stand, and the consequence was that the hot-heads threatened his life.

He did not care very much for that, for he knew he was right, and that his heirs would fight the matter as strongly as he.

There was one brutal sort of fellow living on one of the richest farms owned by Davenport, which had come down from his ancestors, and for which he had paid no rent for twenty years.

When Davenport claimed his rent, this man swore that he would never pay it, that the farm was his, and that he would like to see anyone take it away from him.

He had grown rich upon it, and might easily have bought it without feeling it, but he stuck up for his principles, as he called them, and threatened that he would shoot Davenport on sight if he persisted in his demands.

He was one of the loudest blusters of the lot, and made the most vindictive speeches at the anti-rent meetings, having a large following of just such fellows as himself.

Public opinion was not entirely in accord with these rioters, although there were a great many of them, and the better disposed portion of the community half resolved to put a stop to their excesses.

I was in the neighborhood at that time, Davenport being a warm personal friend of mine, and I determined to give him

all the assistance that lay in my power towards punishing the malcontents.

Dunning, the man who gave Davenport the most trouble, I had seen several times, and was not struck at all favorably by his appearance.

He was thick-set, had a bull neck, coarse features, gruff voice, rude manners, and an entire lack of refinement, was a perfect boor, in fact, and a man that one would naturally distrust upon first sight.

He had a son that was very much the same sort of person in a minor degree as his father, and the two were the most bitter anti-renters in the whole neighborhood.

One day Davenport asked me to go up into the woods with him and have some sport, there being some fine shooting, and the season having just begun.

There were three of us, all told, Davenport, his son, and myself, and we started out in the best of spirits, never anticipating any trouble.

We spent the afternoon in sport, and enjoyed ourselves immensely, bagging considerable game, and never thinking of returning until it began to grow dark.

At last we started, Davenport ahead, and Charlie and myself following behind.

Davenport was several paces ahead of us, and had entered an open place in the woods, where the path widened, when we suddenly heard him utter a cry of alarm.

He had come opposite to a large stump, when a man's head and shoulders suddenly appeared above it, and a gun was pointed at his heart.

He started back in surprise, and seemed utterly overcome, and at that moment young Davenport and myself came in sight.

There were two men, the one with the gun being roughly clad in a coarse, checkered coat, a heavy slouched hat on his head, and his face entirely concealed by a mask of calico.

The other was roughly dressed, carried a stout cudgel, and wore a wig, the hair falling thick around his face, which was painted a fierce red in order to prevent recognition.

The truth flashed upon me at once—the men were anti-renters, and intended to murder the daring landlord.

Such occurrences were by no means rare, unfortunately, and in most cases detection was impossible.

I shouted out a warning, and we both dashed forward, our weapons in our hands.

There was a flash and a report, a stifled cry, and Davenport fell upon his face in the path, shot down by the assassin.

Charlie fired a shot at the two men, who turned and fled upon our approach.

The bullet struck the larger man in the arm and tore away a fragment of his coat sleeve, which Charlie picked up and carefully preserved.

We dared not follow the villains while our companion lay wounded, perhaps dying, in the path, and consequently we had to let them escape, and turned our attention to Davenport.

He had received a bad hurt, and was even then in a dying state, having barely five minutes to live.

We raised him up and stanching the blood as well as we could, giving him water and brandy from our flasks.

He seemed desirous of saying something, but it was only with a great effort that he managed to speak.

"I've been done for, Charlie," he said to his son, "and by that scoundrel—" Here his voice broke down. "Follow him up and bring him to punishment."

"Who was the man?" I asked, for neither of us had recognized him in his disguise.

"I knew him at once," said the dying man. "I saw his wicked eye fixed upon me. He has done his work, but my

death shall not go unavenged. Promise me that he shall be punished."

"Yes, yes, he shall be," I said; "but his name—who is he?"

"A tenant of mine. You know him well enough, man; he's one of the——" A severe coughing fit here interrupted him. "Why, why, he's that miserable old——"

His mouth filled with blood, his head fell backwards, his eyes became glassy and stared fixedly at me for a moment, then the lids closed slowly, there were one or two convulsive movements, and he was dead.

His secret had perished with him, and the task before me was rendered ten times as difficult as it might have been had he lived another minute.

The work of detecting the murderer would be extremely difficult, but I resolved for my old friend's sake, to say nothing of the cause of justice, to ferret the villain out and give him the punishment he deserved.

Young Davenport and I took the body home and prepared it for burial, the neighbors being very indignant over the cold-blooded murder of a man universally beloved.

The funeral was largely attended, and many were the threats uttered against the unknown assassins; and I believe if it had been known then who they were that their lives would have been forfeited in very short order.

I suspected that Dunning and his son had committed the crime, as they were the most vindictive enemies that Davenport had, and had threatened his life more than once; but in a community as peculiarly situated as this one was, I knew the task of bringing the villains to justice would be a hard one, even had I discovered beyond a doubt who the men were.

After the first excitement there came a revulsion of feeling, and the people did not seem to care anything about the murder, or whether the assassins were captured, any more than to look out for themselves, perhaps.

I had made up my mind, however, to bring Dunning to the gallows, if he was the real criminal, and set about the task at once.

A meeting of anti-renters was to take place in the woods the next day, and thither I went in disguise, thinking that I might find some clew to the villains.

The place of rendezvous was crowded, and a more villainous lot of men I never beheld at one time in all my life, the majority of them being disguised, many as Indians, and some in nondescript costumes unlike anything in heaven or on earth.

I pushed my way into the crowd, while a big, red-faced man was making an incendiary speech, and presently met with a decided surprise.

Standing in front of me was a man with a large, checkered coat, one sleeve of which was torn, and a big slouched hat and calico mask.

It was the man who had killed Davenport in the woods two days before, and evidently had no fear of the law in his mind, as he had taken no pains to change his disguise.

Beside him was the other figure, the man with the cudgel and painted face, his companion upon that occasion.

In pushing through the crowd, I trod on the first man's foot, and he turned upon me with an angry remark, flashing his serpent-like eyes upon me, and clenching his fist.

The man was Dunning!

I recognized his baleful glance, despite the mask, and was satisfied from what Davenport had said before he died that here was the murderer.

The man with him was his son, beyond a doubt, as they always went together, and were equally dangerous in character.

I was perfectly satisfied in my own mind that Dunning was the man, but I was not prepared for the startling confirmation of my suspicions which was soon afterwards presented to me

After one or two more fiery speeches Dunning himself mounted the platform, and made the most rabid speech I had ever listened to.

He argued assassination right and left, and said that nothing was necessary but to show the despots that they could not trample men under feet, and the troubles would cease.

"What business have they to claim our farms, upon which we have poured the sweat of our hands and our hearts' blood?" he roared. "Drive the invaders out, that's what we want to do. Follow my lead, kill your tyrants, and put an end to the business. Who killed Davenport? I did, and I am glad of it. Do likewise, and you will all be free."

There was a tremendous shouting and cheering, the men seeming to be in entire sympathy with the murderer.

I own that I was positively astounded, and could hardly believe my ears.

A man confess murder to a multitude, and receive their plaudits, instead of being shot down by a dozen hands or seized and hurried off to prison!

I saw at once the folly of trying to punish him here, but meant to follow him up and take him unawares.

My intentions were most suddenly and peremptorily thwarted, and in a most unexpected manner.

While the man was gesticulating and talking boisterously I heard a sharp report, saw a slight puff of smoke, and then came the whizzing of a bullet.

Dunning suddenly stopped, clapped his hand to his head, tore away the mask, and fell forward like a log.

When those nearest him picked him up they found a small round hole, the outlines of a bluish color, in the middle of the man's forehead.

He had been met with his own argument, the musket, and was as dead as any man ever was, having been killed instantly.

Some silent avenger had marked the man for his victim, and his work had been done only too surely.

There was a scene of confusion, and many of the anti-renters were so startled by this sudden act of vengeance that they made haste away from the spot, fearing no doubt that they would share the same fate as the hot-headed Dunning.

I did not care myself to remain there any longer, and I made myself scarce in short order.

I could imagine only one person that was capable of doing this summary act of justice, and that was Charlie Davenport. He was the silent avenger beyond a doubt.

An immediate search was made for the person, but no one had seen him, and no one knew anything about it, so sudden had it all taken place.

The meeting was soon afterward broken up, and the subsequent ones were not so public, the malcontents not relishing the idea of having their own weapons turned against them.

I found Charlie at home, much to my surprise, and told him what had happened.

"Serves him right," was all he said, and I could get nothing else out of him.

The land question was subsequently settled, as every sensible man knew it would be, in the only way possible, and the existing events of the time were after a little forgotten, but I am satisfied to this day that it was Charlie Davenport who thus summarily avenged his father's murder, though he never either denied or confessed it.

The June bride frowned. "These tomatoes," she said, "are just twice as dear as those across the street. Why is it?" "Ah, ma'am, these"—and the grocer smiled—"these are hand picked." She blushed. "Of course," she said, hastily; "I might have known. Give me a bushel, please."

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